



BREAKFASTS,
ENTRÉES,
AND MORE

the **GLUTEN-FREE**
ALMOND FLOUR *cookbook*



ELANA AMSTERDAM





the
**GLUTEN-FREE
ALMOND FLOUR**
cookbook

Breakfasts, Entrées, and More

Elana Amsterdam
Photographs by Annabelle Breakey


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Dedication

For Rob, an honest critic, amazing friend, and fantastic partner; J, for sharing your exquisitely discerning palate and truthfulness; and E, for knowing how to mix the wet into the dry.



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Introduction

I've always loved to cook. As a girl, I baked cookies almost every day after school—by the time I was twelve, I had the Tollhouse recipe committed to memory. In high school, I created my own chocolate chip cookie recipe and sold the treats locally.

In my midtwenties, I spent my waking hours at a full-time job in environmental consulting and taught yoga on the side. Part of my yoga teacher training included the study of Ayurvedic nutrition. My lifelong interest in cooking—albeit not exactly wholesome up to that point—combined with my passion for ecological matters resulted in my thorough investigation of nutrition and alternative living, which changed the course of my life.

At age thirty, my interest in healthy eating and holistic living proved pivotal when I was diagnosed with celiac disease, an autoimmune disorder that causes damage to the small intestine, which can lead to the malabsorption of nutrients. This genetic intolerance to gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, and barley, triggers a destructive reaction of the immune system. Celiac, which often goes undiagnosed, is considered a multiorgan system disease.¹

This diagnosis led me on a personal culinary journey to develop delicious, nourishing, gluten-free foods for everyone in my home. I had no interest in creating separate meal plans for various family members. My intention was to make one meal that would meet my dietary restrictions without compromising taste for family and friends.

As I explored the gluten-free world, I was disappointed. I could not get accustomed to the dry, odd-flavored baked goods and strange, gritty textures. I wouldn't compromise taste just because I had celiac disease. In addition, I found that much of the (overly sweetened) high-glycemic, gluten-free foods played with my blood sugar in an alarming way. For me, mood swings and high-carb hangovers were unacceptable side effects of a gluten-free diet.

Luckily, I stumbled upon an enlightened group of gluten-free people on the Internet; these people introduced me to almond flour, which I quickly saw had great potential for creating classic recipes that were gluten-free, high in protein, and lower in sugar and carbohydrates.

After three years of tasting and testing—on classes of schoolchildren (trust me, they won't lie—if the food isn't good, they'll just spit it out), friends, family, and complete strangers—I began to feel encouraged in my mission to turn gluten-free food into delicious mainstream fare.

It wasn't long before parents stopped me in the parking lot with recipe requests. I mailed recipes to friends and family across the country. And the best part was that most of these people didn't have food restrictions.

Soon I had the problems that every recipe writer wants: moms calling me to bake their children's birthday cakes, friends and acquaintances asking for cooking classes, teachers requesting my recipes for school parties. In response, I launched a blog in 2006 (www.elanaspantry.com) to share my recipes, health tips, and overall love affair with food with a broader audience.

Almond flour has been the perfect vehicle in my journey to unite people around good food. It is a simple ingredient—easy to use, with elegant results and excellent nutrition. I hope you enjoy making these recipes as much as I have enjoyed creating them! I offer the fruits of my labor with love and gratitude to friends, family, and readers.

Using Almond Flour

In European countries where wheat and corn don't dominate agriculture, vibrant, centuries-old traditions make delicious use of almond flour in dishes such as marzipan, macaroons, and tortes. These cultures discovered the secret of almond flour long ago: it tastes delicious, it's easy to use, and it's a superfood.

TASTE

Almond flour tastes sweet, rich, and buttery, making it somewhat indistinguishable from wheat flour in baked goods and other dishes.

As opposed to the dry, gritty texture of rice flour and other gluten-free flours in baked goods, almond flour is smooth and has excellent mouth feel.

EASE OF USE

Almond flour is as easy to use as wheat flour and much less tedious than complex gluten-free flours, which require numerous supplemental ingredients such as xanthum gum, cornstarch, and potato flakes for binding purposes. Because it requires numerous additional ingredients, gluten-free baking has traditionally been known as a painstaking, time-consuming task. This is not the case with almond flour baking, which is actually even quicker and easier than most traditional wheat-based recipes that require yeast and rising time.

SUPERFOOD

Almond flour is a highly nutritious superfood that is low-carb and rich in vitamins, minerals, and "good" fats. Almond flour is not only the healthiest flour around, it is also higher in protein and far richer in nutrients than wheat flour and its gluten-free counterparts; a serving of almond flour is packed with protein and fiber.

Comparison of Nutritional Values: Almond Flour versus Other Flours

Nutrition Info (100 g): Almond Flour³

Protein: 21.94 g

Carbohydrates: 19.44 g

Glycemic Index²: < 1

Fiber: 10.4 g

Nutrition Info (100 g): White Wheat Flour⁴

Protein: 9.71 g

Carbohydrates: 76.22 g

Glycemic Index²: 71

Fiber: 2.4 g

Nutrition Info (100 g): Rice Flour⁵

Protein: 5.95 g

Carbohydrates: 80.13 g

Glycemic Index²: 98

Fiber: 2.4 g

Almond flour is not only full of incredible antioxidants and found to be allergenic in only percent of the population, it is also an ideal recovery food for cyclists and other athletes.

Vitamins and Minerals: Almond Flour versus Other Flours

Nutrition Info (100 g): Potassium

Almond Flour⁶: 687 mg

White Wheat Flour⁷: 149 mg

Rice Flour⁸: 76 mg

Nutrition Info (100 g): Magnesium

Almond Flour⁶: 275 mg

White Wheat Flour⁷: 25 mg

Rice Flour⁸: 35 mg

Nutrition Info (100 g): Niacin

Almond Flour⁶: 3.6 mg

White Wheat Flour⁷: 1.2 mg

Rice Flour⁸: 2.6 mg

Nutrition Info (100 g): Alpha-tocopherol

Almond Flour⁶: 24.7 mg

White Wheat Flour⁷: .05 mg

Rice Flour⁸: .11 mg

Nutrition Info (100 g): Calcium

Almond Flour⁶: 216 mg

White Wheat Flour⁷: 20 mg

Rice Flour⁸: 10 mg

Nutrition Info (100 g): Iron

Almond Flour⁶: 3.72 mg

White Wheat Flour⁷: 1.26 mg

Rice Flour⁸: .35 mg

During the 1990s, the medical community began to discover the health benefits of almonds. Numerous studies now point to increasing almond intake as beneficial for stabilizing blood sugar, controlling appetite, preventing obesity, and providing antioxidants as well as numerous other nutrients. Such studies also tout almonds as a heart-healthy food.

Unlike its high-glycemic wheat and rice flour counterparts, the high protein content of almond flour makes it an optimal ingredient for stabilizing blood sugar. It is thus the ideal fare for diabetics and those who experience difficulty metabolizing sugar, which is a common issue among people with celiac disease.

Recent research indicates that diabetics and those with celiac disease share a similar strand of DNA, enhancing the appeal of almond flour as a tool to simultaneously go gluten-free while lowering one's glucose intake. The recipes in this book use almond flour and low-glycemic sweeteners rather than sugar, allowing people with food restrictions to enjoy their favorite desserts without worrying about spiking blood sugar levels.

Because almonds enhance satiety, they are an ideal food for those looking to maintain or lose weight. Researchers concluded that almonds' heart-healthy monounsaturated fat helps to satisfy appetite and prevent overeating. A 2003 study in the *Journal of Obesity* found that "adding a daily ration of almonds to a low-calorie diet enhanced weight loss as well as significantly improved risk factors associated with heart disease."

The American Heart Association has further determined that the "good" fats in almonds actually lower cholesterol, making almonds a star ingredient for patients with heart disease.

Finally, there is no reason for almond flour to be limited to the above populations on special diets. Almond flour provides a return to wholesome eating in an era of increasingly processed food, proliferating food allergies, and health ailments. As you will see in the following recipes, almond flour is the king of alternative flours.



Stocking the Almond Flour Pantry

The recipes in this book are simple and easy—some contain six ingredients or less, and can be prepared in well under an hour. You do not need to be a chef, or even have prior cooking experience, to successfully prepare the dishes featured here. Though it is crucial that you have the correct ingredients. In this chapter, you'll find information about the ingredients featured in the recipes, as well as handling and storing instructions.

ALMOND FLOUR

Almond flour is actually a by-product of the process in which almond slices and slivers are produced. First, the almonds are blanched—the skin is removed in a water bath. Next, they are cut into sliced or diced almonds. The fragments and small pieces that result from this process (a sort of almond sawdust) ultimately become almond flour. In the final stage of this process, the by-product, which may be somewhat coarse, is put through a screen with tiny holes to ensure smooth flour with a uniformly fine consistency.

Almond flour is not to be confused with almond meal, which contains whole, ground almonds that still have the skin on them. *Please note:* Almond meal or almond flour that is not blanched will not work for the recipes in this book—you will not achieve the desired results.

Baking with almond flour is extremely easy. There is no yeast or rising time with the baked goods in this cookbook, which means instant gratification in your baking endeavors.

Almond flour is available at health food stores and many grocery stores as well. It is also widely available on the Internet. I recommend purchasing almond flour online, as it is generally half the price of the same product in a retail outlet.

Please note: Unfortunately, the almond flour produced by Bob's Red Mill is much coarser than the other brands of almond flour I have tested for this book. Because of its consistency it does not work in these recipes.

Whenever possible, purchase your almond flour from a vendor that refrigerates it. The product will be of higher quality because the fats are less likely to have gone rancid and therefore it will keep for a longer period of time. Almond flour can be stored in a tightly sealed glass jar in the refrigerator or freezer for several months.

SALT

I use Celtic Sea Salt in all of my recipes and highly recommend it. Be sure to purchase the *finely ground* Celtic Sea Salt as it is optimal for baking—it mixes into cookies and other baked goods quite evenly.

I store my salt in a large glass jar in the pantry, where it keeps indefinitely and requires no cold storage. I also keep a small bowl of salt on the counter next to my measuring spoons, so

I have some ready when I'm cooking up a quick batch of cookies or other treats.

AGAVE NECTAR

Sweetness is the first taste we experience in life, the primal taste of infancy; we all need some form of sweetness in our lives. For several years, I researched delicious, healthy alternatives to sugar that held up well in the baking process yet did not substantially raise glycemic index values.

Because celiac and diabetes ride on the same gene (increasing the frequency of one disease when the other occurs), I have found it helpful as someone with celiac disease to monitor my intake of sweets. I do not believe that such diseases suddenly appear; I think they take years to develop and that anything we can do to lower our chances of incurring them is beneficial. For this reason, I have included a sweetness indicator in many of these recipes. It will let you know which recipes to use when you are in the mood for a slightly sweet treat or a more decadent dessert. Recipes that do not have a significant amount of sweetener do not have a sweetness indicator.

Agave, the nectar of the agave plant—a golden liquid readily available at health food stores—has become my go-to sweetener. It is much lower on the glycemic index than other sweeteners:

Glycemic Index

Sugar: 58⁹

Maple Syrup: 54¹⁰

Honey: 52¹¹

Agave Nectar: 32¹²

In all of my recipes, I use USDA-certified organic light agave nectar. As opposed to dark or amber, light agave has a more neutral flavor and resembles sugar most closely in taste when added to baked goods.

Many people ask why I don't use honey as a sweetener in my recipes. I choose agave nectar because I consider honey a flavor, not a sweetener, and I tend to use it for medicinal purposes rather than as an ingredient in my baking.

I purchase agave nectar by the gallon because it dramatically cuts the cost. If you buy yours this way, be sure to also purchase a pump for the gallon-size container. Whatever you do, because of the expense, avoid buying small containers of agave.

GRAPSEED OIL

Let's face it, food needs fat to taste good; oils impart rich flavor and texture. Grapeseed is my oil of choice.

Why? Grapeseed oil is the ideal replacement for butter in baked goods, making it optimal for those on a dairy-free diet. It is also low in cholesterol, and has a neutral flavor.

I purchase my oils (including grapeseed) in glass containers, because plastic contains endocrine-disrupting chemicals that are exacerbated when they come into contact with oil.

COCONUT OIL

I use coconut oil to lend a tropical flavor to certain baked goods. At colder temperatures, coconut oil is solid and requires melting before it can be used in recipes. When heated, it can scorch very easily, so be sure to heat it at a very low temperature. During the summer months, it will be in a more liquid state and will not require melting. Purchase only food-grade coconut oil in glass jars, and make sure it is unrefined and not hydrogenated. High-quality coconut oil will have a slightly sweet smell, coconut flavor, and no aftertaste.

VANILLA EXTRACT

I use a high-quality pure organic gluten-free vanilla extract, manufactured by Flavorganics. I purchase the eight-ounce size, the largest sold retail, to reduce costs and minimize my consumption of glass.

CHOCOLATE

Chocolate is reputedly an aphrodisiac. In addition, studies show that chocolate is a potent antioxidant that can reduce blood pressure and raise good cholesterol. These benefits are derived from eating dark chocolate, not milk or white chocolate.

I bake with Dagoba organic unsweetened cocoa powder and dark chocolate (bars or chocodrops) because Dagoba is organic and dark chocolate has a much higher cocoa content and less sugar than semisweet or milk chocolate. The chocodrops are disks that are similar to chocolate chips, just a bit larger and flatter. If you want to use a bar of chocolate, just chop into chunks and then measure it in a cup. If you are weighing the chocolate, one cup of chocodrops is equal to approximately six ounces by weight.

Because the percentages of cocoa butter and powder vary from product to product and brand to brand, make sure that the chocolate you use is 73 percent cacao for these recipes.

ARROWROOT POWDER

Arrowroot is a ubiquitous weed that grows in the southern United States. It is a thickener commonly used in Ayurvedic cooking.

If you are unfamiliar with arrowroot powder, the following basic tips will help. When a recipe calls for an arrowroot slurry or paste, be sure to combine the arrowroot and water in a small bowl, making a smooth mixture without any lumps. Generally, you will be adding the slurry or paste to a mixture on the stove. When doing so, it is important to raise the heat to high and mix thoroughly until the arrowroot is well integrated and the mixture on the stove completely thickens.

AGAR FLAKES

Agar is a vegan thickener made of seaweed, similar to gelatin, commonly used in Asian cooking. When using this thickener it is of utmost importance to bring your mixture to a rolling boil, until the agar thoroughly dissolves.

FRUIT SPREAD

I use Rigoni di Asiago brand fruit spread, which is made from organic fruit. The fact that these fruit spreads are juice sweetened (with no refined sugars) adds to their appeal. When using jam, it's extremely important to use an organic product. In conventional jams, as the fruit concentrates so does the pesticide content. This creates an added toxic burden in little jam-loving children who weigh less than adults.

YACON SYRUP

Yacon is a root composed primarily of water and fructo-oligosaccharides (FOS)—these types of short chain sugars have a lower caloric value (as they are digested anaerobically) and high fiber content. I use yacon syrup in recipes that traditionally call for molasses, such as gingerbread.

ALL PURPOSE CHEF'S SHAKE SEASONING

This gluten-free spice blend produced by Spice Hunter contains onion, garlic, celery seed, marjoram, and several other ground spices. I use it as a convenient shortcut to add flavor to savory dishes rather than using a laundry list of spices.

MAGIC LINE LOAF PAN (7.5 by 3.5 by 2.25 inches)

This commercial quality, heavy-duty loaf pan is the perfect size for evenly cooking a loaf of bread made with almond flour. In my testing I found that standard size loaf pans did not bake the bread through to the center, leaving the middle undercooked. This loaf pan is shallow enough that your breads will be cooked through.

Breakfast

Banana Blueberry Muffins

Cinnamon Apple Muffins

Date Pecan Muffins

Orange Apricot Scones

Chocolate Chip Scones

Classic Drop Biscuits

French Toast

Pancakes

Cinnamon Coffee Cake

Banana Blueberry Muffins

MAKES 12 MUFFINS ✦ SWEETNESS: LOW

While I use agave nectar in many recipes, fruit alone sweetens these muffins, making them the ideal treat for those looking to reduce their glycemic load.

3 cups blanched almond flour

¼ teaspoon sea salt

1½ teaspoons baking soda

2 tablespoons grapeseed oil

3 large eggs

2 cups (4 to 5) mashed very ripe bananas

1 cup frozen blueberries

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line 12 muffin cups with paper liners.

In a large bowl, combine the almond flour, salt, and baking soda. In a medium bowl, whisk together the grapeseed oil and eggs. Stir the wet ingredients into the almond flour mixture until thoroughly combined. Stir the bananas into the batter, then fold in the blueberries. Spoon the batter into the prepared muffin cups.

Bake for 35 to 40 minutes, until the muffin tops are golden brown and a toothpick inserted into the center of a muffin comes out clean. Let the muffins cool in the pan for 30 minutes, then serve.

Cinnamon Apple Muffins

MAKES 10 MUFFINS ✦ SWEETNESS: MEDIUM

A whisper of cinnamon and ambrosial bits of fresh apple scattered throughout make this moist, mouthwatering muffin great for breakfast, snack, or a healthy lunchbox treat.

- 2 cups blanched almond flour
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ cup arrowroot powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ cup grapeseed oil
- ½ cup agave nectar
- 1 large egg
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 2 medium apples, peeled, cored, and diced into ¼-inch cubes

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line 10 muffin cups with paper liners.

In a large bowl, combine the almond flour, salt, baking soda, arrowroot powder, and cinnamon. In a medium bowl, whisk together the grapeseed oil, agave nectar, egg, and vanilla extract. Stir the wet ingredients into the almond flour mixture until thoroughly combined, then fold in the apples. Spoon the batter into the prepared muffin cups.

Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until the muffin tops are golden brown and a toothpick inserted into the center of a muffin comes out clean. Let the muffins cool in the pan for 30 minutes, then serve.

Date Pecan Muffins

MAKES 12 MUFFINS ✦ SWEETNESS: MEDIUM

Satisfying and highly nutritious, these lightly sweetened muffins have chunks of date (a good source of potassium, calcium, and iron) and pecan (high in protein, fiber, and antioxidants) in every bite.

3 cups blanched almond flour
½ teaspoon sea salt
½ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
¼ cup grapeseed oil
2 tablespoons agave nectar
2 large eggs
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
2 medium apples, peeled, cored, and sliced
1 cup pecans, coarsely chopped
½ cup dates, chopped into ¼-inch pieces

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line 12 muffin cups with paper liners.

In a large bowl, combine the almond flour, salt, baking soda, and nutmeg. In a blender, combine the grapeseed oil, agave nectar, eggs, vanilla extract, and apples; process on high until smooth. Stir the wet ingredients into the almond flour mixture until thoroughly combined, then fold in the pecans and dates. Spoon the batter into the prepared muffin cups.

Bake for 35 to 45 minutes, until the muffin tops are golden brown and a toothpick inserted into the center of a muffin comes out clean. Let the muffins cool in the pan for 30 minutes, then serve.

Orange Apricot Scones

MAKES 16 SCONES ✦ **SWEETNESS: MEDIUM**

Unlike most scones, which tend to have chunks of dried fruit and nuts, the fruit in these scones is pureed, creating a uniquely smooth consistency. With a delicate orange-apricot flavor, you'll find that they are just too good to limit to breakfast.

3 cups blanched almond flour
¼ teaspoon sea salt
¾ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
¼ cup grapeseed oil
3 tablespoons agave nectar
3 large eggs
½ cup dried apricots, chopped into ¼-inch pieces
¼ cup freshly squeezed orange juice
1 tablespoon orange zest

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line 2 large baking sheets with parchment paper.

In a large bowl, combine the almond flour, salt, baking soda, cinnamon, and nutmeg. In a blender, combine the grapeseed oil, agave nectar, eggs, apricots, orange juice, and orange zest; process on high for about 1 minute, until smooth. Stir the wet ingredients into the almond flour mixture until thoroughly combined. Drop the batter, in scant ¼ cups 2 inches apart, onto the prepared baking sheets.

Bake for 10 to 15 minutes, until golden brown or a toothpick inserted into the center of a scone comes out clean. Let the scones cool on the baking sheets for 30 minutes, then serve.

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