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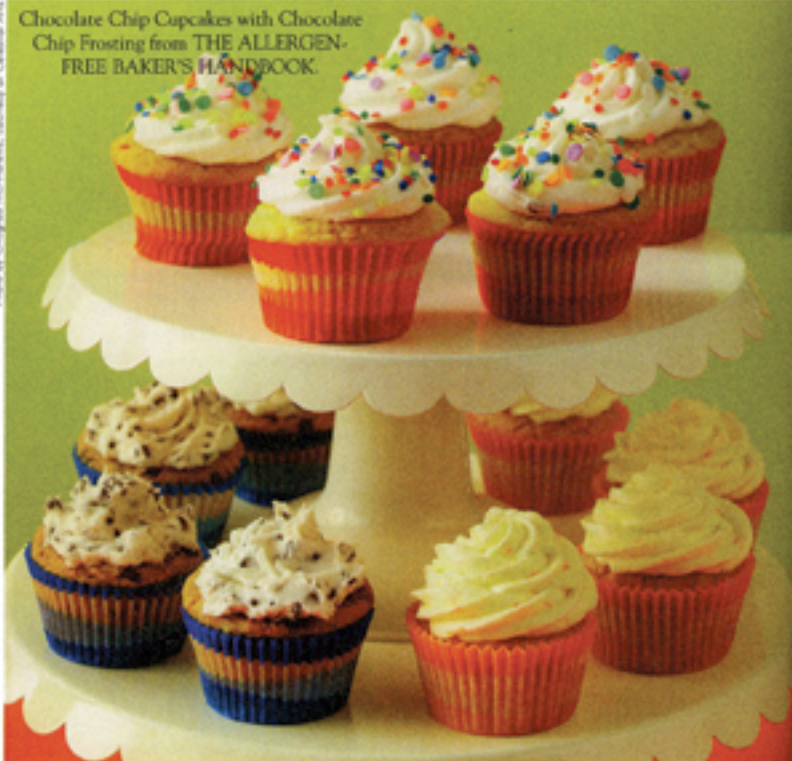


Grass Roots Publishing



Photos by: Christoph McAndrews, courtesy of Celestial Arts

Chocolate Chip Cupcakes with Chocolate Chip Frosting from **THE ALLERGEN-FREE BAKER'S HANDBOOK**.



FREE FOOD

Two new books focus on gluten and allergen-free foods!

BY CLAUDIA KOUSOULAS

If you are looking for ways to cut gluten from your diet, **THE GLUTEN-FREE ALMOND FLOUR COOKBOOK** by Elana Amsterdam (Celestial Arts, \$16.99) frees you from totally restocking your pantry with xanthan gum, potato flour, and cornstarch.

But before you get started, Amsterdam clarifies that almond flour should not be confused with almond meal. The meal is simply ground nuts, while flour is ground, blanched, and sieved to make a much lighter product.

Without gluten, yeast becomes unnecessary and Amsterdam's recipes continue a long tradition of baking with almond flour - tortes and macaroons - by adding scones, cakes, cookies, and crackers.

Sesame Crackers are a quick blend of almond flour, sesame seeds, eggs, oil, and salt that bake into crisp fingers with a gourmet taste. Even if gluten is not an issue, you'll want to try these elegant snacks.

Amsterdam's recipes will carry you through the day, with pancakes for breakfast, pizza for lunch, and quiche for dinner. She takes classic recipes, like eggplant Parmesan or chicken fingers and adapts them to almond flour, creating plenty of meal options.

In **THE ALLERGEN-FREE BAKER'S HANDBOOK** (Celestial Arts, \$25.00), Cybele

Pascal takes a more traditional gluten-free approach, using ingredients like xanthan gum, amaranth flour, and flaxseed meal. Her approach is meticulous, even including cider vinegar, which is gluten-free, and hemp milk, a vegan and soy-free option.

Somehow, without using wheat flour, dairy, soy, eggs, or nuts, Pascal finds that baking "possibilities are endless" and with recipes for Chocolate Chunk Brownie Bars, Classic Yellow Cake, or Brandied Peach Tart, she is very convincing.

Before the recipes, Pascal begins the book with a section on replacements for eggs, dairy, and gluten flours. For example, she recommends applesauce or prune puree as binders that can step in for eggs or shortening. It's the kind of advice that can make you an intuitive, allergen-free baker.

She also explores recipes that are good without gluten, that offer similar texture and flavor satisfaction. Socca is a savory French crepe made with high protein chickpea flour. Cook quick and hot, its nutty flavor is complemented with sprinkles of salt and olive oil. Pascal recommends sparking its flavor with cumin or a version with perfumed dried herbs.

As these books prove, special diet doesn't require deprivation, just some kitchen creativity. ☐

