



Keeping the joy in whole-grain holiday baking

November 10, 2014 By: Melissa d'Arabian

When I was 5, my mom invited a bunch of my kindergarten girlfriends and their moms over for cookies, cocoa and caroling to celebrate the holidays. That tradition turned into an annual holiday ritual, and I grew up equating the holiday season with massive amounts of baking, particularly cookies.

The holiday party tradition has carried on today, decades later. My four daughters and I kick off the season by hosting a mother-daughter tea every year the weekend after Thanksgiving. So this is a perfect time to explore one of my favorite healthy baking secret weapons - white whole-wheat flour.

Let me start by clearing up any confusion about the term "white whole-wheat."

Despite how it sounds, the term is not referring to bleached wheat flour. Rather, white whole-wheat flour is milled from a variety of wheat that has a lighter color and less pronounced flavor than the more conventional variety used for whole wheat. The result is a whole-grain flour that works great for baking since the texture (soft) and color (white) are closer to the all-purpose flour we associate with holiday baking.

Using white whole wheat in your baking means you can serve whole grains to your family, even while indulging in a sweet holiday treat. Fill up on cookies, you ask? It has been known to happen in our house...

Try white whole-wheat flour in my chocolate almond crescent cookies and you'll have the added bonus of some healthy, filling fats (almonds and coconut oil), along with a relatively low sugar content. And then try swapping white whole-wheat flour for part or all of the all-purpose flour in some your own favorite recipes.

CHOCOLATE ALMOND CRESCENT COOKIES

Start to finish: 1 hour

Makes 16 cookies

4 ounces unsalted butter, softened
4 ounces light cream cheese (Neufchatel), softened
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup white whole-wheat flour
1/4 cup almond butter
2 teaspoons coconut oil
2 teaspoons unsweetened natural cocoa
1 tablespoon maple syrup
Powdered sugar



Heat the oven to 375 F. Line a baking sheet with kitchen parchment.

In a large bowl, use an electric mixer to blend together the butter, cream cheese and vanilla until smooth. Add the salt and half the flour. Mix on low until well-blended. Add the remaining flour, switching to mixing by hand if too thick. If the dough is too sticky, add another teaspoon of flour.

Transfer the dough to a work surface and shape into a disk. Cover with plastic wrap and chill for 15 to 30 minutes while you prepare the filling.

In a small bowl, whisk together the almond butter, coconut oil, cocoa and maple syrup until smooth. If needed, microwave the mixture for 10 seconds to soften.

Once the filling and dough are both ready, on a lightly floured surface roll the dough out to about 1/8 inch thickness. Use a 3-inch biscuit or cookie cutter to cut rounds from the dough, gathering the scraps and rerolling as able. Place 1 teaspoon of the almond filling in the center of each round of dough.

Dip your finger in a small cup of water and gently wet the edges of the dough, then fold one side over the filling and crimp the edges together. Arrange the cookies on the prepared baking sheet, then bake until barely golden, 12 to 13 minutes. Remove the cookies from the oven and transfer to a rack to cool completely. Dust with powdered sugar before serving.

Nutrition information per serving: 140 calories; 90 calories from fat (64 percent of total calories); 10 g fat (5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 20 mg cholesterol; 11 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 3 g protein; 65 mg sodium.