

Food for all

Far from being an inferior option, vegan alternatives provide healthy and delicious baking choices that all the children can share and enjoy together. By *June Graham*

With just a few ground rules and a lot of imagination, it is possible to turn just about every conventional recipe into a vegan one worthy of comparison.

I first became interested in vegan recipes because we had two children in our birth-to-three space who, because of allergies, had to follow a dairy- and egg-free diet. These children often seemed to miss out on some of our special treats and, with a wistful expression on their faces, would watch their friends tuck in. They also missed out on some of the baking experiences as they couldn't handle some of the ingredients.

By far the greatest recommendation for vegan baking is the taste and texture. I find that it is far tastier and moister than baking with eggs and butter, and very rarely use these now. I might develop a few vegan recipe books for the children to use.

To find out about vegan food, I first scoured the library for vegan cookbooks, but then researched online for suggestions for dairy and egg substitutions and cooking for allergies. With this information, I found that I could translate most 'normal' recipes into vegan ones. I also discovered it would be very easy to turn the recipes into gluten-free ones if the need arose.

Before this research, vegan cooking conjured visions of brown rice and lentils and I was pleasantly surprised by the wide choice of foods that could be used. One of those surprises was that cocoa was dairy free so I could make chocolate cakes and cookies. I can still remember the look on one child's face when he was presented with some chocolate cake for the first time in nursery. His eyes lit up.

Vegan baking in many ways appears a healthier option. As you are using mashed bananas and pureed fruit instead of eggs, this adds sweetness, so you need less sugar. The fruit is also part of the children's 'five a day'.



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involves a lot of calculation of the liquids, and the arrowroot can also leave a dry taste in the mouth.

Butter and fat

There are some fatless recipes around, but I generally use a good quality soya margarine or sunflower oil. The soya margarine is good for recipes such as cookies or buttercream, but for most other things I prefer to use the oil.

Because oil cooks at a different temperature to butter or margarine, you need 20 per cent less. This means you are adding less fat too.

Milk

There are many dairy-free milk substitutes on the market such as soya, rice, oat and almond milk. They all have different tastes and you can choose what is most suitable for your recipe.

Because of children with nut allergies, I avoid almond milk. Fruit juice can be used too. As well as adding some flavour, it also reduces the amount of the sugar. ■



SUBSTITUTES

Egg

In place of each egg in a baking recipe, you can use one small or half a large mashed banana plus half a teaspoonful of baking powder. It tastes really nice in the chocolate cake mixture. For a slightly different flavour, you can add 50ml of apple, peach, apricot or pear puree plus half a teaspoonful of baking powder in place of each egg. This provides some extra fibre.

There are other substitutes such as arrowroot and you can replace plain flour with self-raising flour, but this

CARROT AND PINEAPPLE MUFFINS

These muffins have had the thumbs up from parents and children. Lucy Power-Sheppard, mother of Bella and Isla-Rose, says, 'These muffins are delicious, as well as being a healthy snack that keeps you going until teatime. My kids love them too!'

Ingredients

120g plain flour
80g wholemeal flour

1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
200ml vegetable or sunflower oil
50g demerara sugar
100g grated carrots
225g crushed pineapple (drained)

Method

- Preheat oven to 180°C/ gas mark 4.
- Sift the flour, baking powder

and bicarb into a large bowl.

- In another bowl, beat together the oil and sugar.
- Mix in the carrots and pineapple.
- Add the flour mixture and stir to combine. It should still be lumpy but the flour should be absorbed.
- Fill your muffin cases $\frac{3}{4}$ full and bake for approximately 25 minutes until golden and firm.