

Food

Tasty and sweet – but these treats come without

Being allergic to certain ingredients need not be a disaster, Tarja Moles tells **Becky Sheaves**



“Having a sweet tooth and being on a restricted diet is a tricky combination,” explains cookbook author Tarja Moles of Tavistock. “There have been countless times over the years when I have stood by patisserie windows and looked longingly at their cakes, without being able to have any myself.” As is the case with 20 per cent of people from her home country of Finland, Tarja cannot digest lactose, the sugar found in milk. “It’s a common problem for us Finns,” she explains. But Tara’s list of food intolerances grew dramatically ten years ago, leading to tummy aches, headaches and a feeling of perpetual unwellness. Today, she reacts badly to a wide range of everyday foods, including eggs, wheat and sugar. Not to mention peanuts, honey, yeast and soya. And she is not alone in having to be very careful what she eats. Food intolerances and allergies are on the up. Almost one in 20 people in the UK has diabetes. One in 100 of us has coeliac disease and cannot eat gluten, the pro-

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tein found in wheat. And one in ten is diagnosed with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), triggered by a range of allergenic foodstuffs. “It was really miserable at first, I just felt there was nothing I could eat and truly enjoy,” says Tarja, who is married to David, a dentist. Given her penchant for sweet things, Tarja’s greatest difficulties came with the dessert course. “I’d be out with friends watching everyone tucking into pastries or cakes. I’d sip a cup of mint tea and feel sorry for myself.” So Tarja put her research skills – she has a PhD in history – to good use. “I realised I was going to have to learn to make food I could eat, for my own sanity,” she says.

What’s more, she sought out clever techniques and a wider range of alternative ingredients. Now, with a little culinary ingenuity, she has devised recipes for chocolate profiteroles, biscuits, pancakes and even ice cream that are free from milk, sugar, eggs and gluten.

The results are now showcased in her cookbook. It’s called *No Naughties*, subtitled *Sweet Treats without Sugar, Wheat, Gluten and Yeast*. “I have tested each recipe so many times, to make sure everything works,” she says. “The success of these experiments has been mixed, from cakes that have damaged the bin to puddings served to guests without them knowing they were sugar-free. “My poor mother-in-law was heroic in tasting recipes time after time as I tweaked them.” The recipes in Tarja’s cookbook are all, to some extent, “free-from”, but



Strawberry boost, above, is a dairy-free recipe from Tavistock’s Tarja Moles, opposite. Tarja’s new ‘free-from’ cookbook includes recipes for drop scones, biscotti and even profiteroles, pictured right

for Tarja, it is the flavour that is paramount. “My aim has been to make all the treats taste as ‘normal’ as possible,” she explains. “Many ready-made gluten-free products have a particular tang which isn’t particularly nice. I have also steered clear of artificial sweeteners as they can also compromise flavour.” Tarja has sought out innovative natural ingredients to use, which she lists in her book and on her website, www.nonaughties.com. She finds the natural sweetener xylitol, made from birch sap, a good sugar substitute, and

also recommends a fruit sweetener called Sweet Freedom. “Dove’s Farm is the best for gluten-free flour. I also use Italian polenta flour or ground almonds in baking,” she says. “Perhaps because so many of us from Scandinavia have dairy intolerance, the Danish firm Arla’s lactose-free range is very good. “the good news is that over the years, it has become much easier to get free-from ingredients in shops and supermarkets, as well as online.” So is there anything that Tarja cannot cook using alternative ingredients? “I’ve cracked just about

everything, right down to drop scones with cream and lemon drizzle cake,” she says. “The only thing that has defeated me is creme brulee. “I’ve managed to make a lovely custard but I just cannot find a way of making a burnt sugar topping without real sugar. Nothing caramelises in the same way. But I’m still working on it!” In the meantime, here are two of her recipes to try. They are proof that dishes can be “free from” but still taste wonderful.

No Naughties by Tarja Moles (Luscious Books, £11.99), www.nonaughties.com

Strawberry Boost

Gluten-free, wheat-free, sugar-free, yeast-free, soya-free, egg-free, peanut-free, corn-free, vegetarian, nut-free low lactose.

Tarja says: ‘This is a superb breakfast. Not only does it taste yummy, but it also keeps the hunger away for a long time. It’s an ideal treat for those with high cholesterol as oats and almonds are said to contribute to lowering it.’

Serves 2
15g whole blanched almonds
35g gluten-free oats
200g natural yoghurt*
200g strawberries
1 tsp vanilla extract
50 ml apple juice
Sweet Freedom (natural fruit sugar alternative) to taste

- Blitz the almonds and the oats in a food processor or electric chopper. Add the yogurt, strawberries, vanilla extract and apple juice and blitz until the mixture is smooth. Taste and add Sweet Freedom if needed.
- Pour into glasses and put in a refrigerator for at least 15 minutes. The longer you leave it, the more the oats will swell and the thicker the mixture will become. If it becomes too thick, add more apple juice.
- If you can’t eat nuts, substitute the almonds for the same amount of oats (so the total amount is 50g). To make the treat low in lactose, use natural yogurt with probiotics (bio-cultures).

Biscotti

Gluten-free, wheat-free, sugar-free, yeast-free, soya-free, dairy-free, casein-free, lactose-free, peanut-free, vegetarian, nut-free.

Tarja says: ‘Biscotti are twice-baked dry biscuits from Italy. They are a great snack with your morning or afternoon coffee.’

Makes about 20
1 large egg
100g xylitol
half tsp vanilla extract
65g fine polenta
65g Doves Farm gluten-free white bread flour blend
half tsp gluten-free baking powder
quarter tsp salt
60g whole blanched almonds*
70g plain xylitol chocolate drops or xylitol chocolate chopped into tiny pieces

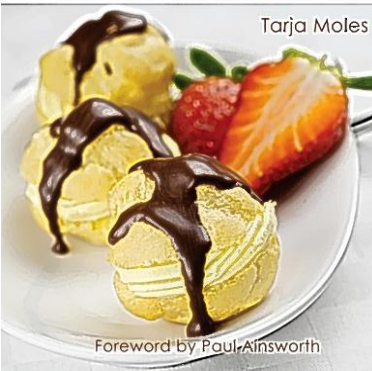
- Pre-heat the oven to 180C (350F, gas mark 4). Line a baking tray with non-stick baking paper. Mix the polenta, flour, baking powder and salt in a bowl.
- In another bowl, whisk the egg and xylitol with an electric whisk until the volume triples. Mix in the vanilla. Fold in the flour mixture, the almonds and the chocolate drops.
- Spoon the thick mixture onto the baking tray, forming an oblong that looks like a log. The size should be about 25 cm x 5 cm. Bake for 20-25 minutes until the log is pale brown. Take out of the oven and let it cool for 10 minutes.
- Reduce the oven temperature to 160C (325F, gas mark 3). Cut the oblong into 1cm slices and turn them on their side. Bake for 10 minutes. Turn the slices to the other side and bake for another 5 minutes.
- Let the biscotti cool and harden on a wire rack for a couple of hours. If you want them really crispy, stand overnight before serving or storing them in an airtight container. If you can’t eat nuts, leave out the almonds.

sugar, wheat, gluten or yeast



No Naughties

Sweet treats without sugar, wheat, gluten and yeast



Comfort Food with ROSA MASHITER



I have been having considerable problems in my garden with brambles. They just seem to appear out of nowhere and before you know it they have taken over. But I am one of those people who like to think that every cloud has a silver lining and although the brambles have wreathed themselves around my poor japonica, they are also providing lots of free fruit in the form of fat, glistening, blackberries. Last weekend I decided that I really must make the most of them. So, wearing suitably unfashionable but practical “protective” clothing, I harvested a goodly amount of them, which I promptly turned into some tasty puddings.

Blackberries are a truly delicious fruit and at this time of year they are there for the picking in the hedgerows – and gardens! Combined with apple, they make an excellent filling for the traditional British pie, or you can make bramble jelly for the store cupboard. Alternatively, you can combine them with other seasonal fruits and produce a more autumnal flavoured version of summer pudding. All you need to do is pick the berries, which are easy to find in August. It certainly beats queuing in the supermarket and no cost – go for it!

Blackberry and Apple Crunch Crumble

Serves 4

500g blackberries
500g apples
75g caster sugar
175g wholemeal flour
75g butter
125g dark muscovado brown sugar
half tsp ground cinnamon
quarter tsp ground mixed spice

- Remove the stalks and leaves from the blackberries and rinse thoroughly under cold running water. Place in a saucepan with a couple of tablespoons of water and bring slowly to the boil. Immediately remove from the heat and allow to cool completely.

- Peel and core the apples and slice thinly. Place in a saucepan with 100ml water and the caster sugar. Cook over a low heat until tender, then remove from the heat and allow to cool.
- Spoon the two lots of fruit into a large pie dish and gently mix together.
- Cut the butter into small pieces and place in a mixing bowl with the flour. Rub the fat into the flour with your fingertips until the mixture resembles coarse breadcrumbs. Stir in the muscovado sugar and spices.
- Spoon the crumble mixture over the fruit, covering it well. Dot with a little extra butter and bake at 190C (375 F, gas mark 5) for approximately 35-40 minutes or until the topping is crisp and golden. Serve with custard, single cream or natural yoghurt.

Autumnal Pudding

Serves 4-6

10 large slices white bread
225g gooseberries
225g plums
450g blackberries
125g redcurrants
150ml clear honey

- Remove the crusts from the bread and use them to line a 1.2litre pudding basin, reserving some for the “lid”.
- Top and tail the gooseberries, stone and quarter the plums. Remove any stalks from the blackberries and wash under cold running water. Remove any stalks and leaves from the redcurrants.
- Put all the fruit into a saucepan together with the honey. Simmer gently, covered, for about ten minutes or until the fruit is tender.
- Using a slotted spoon, transfer the fruit to the pudding basin. Spoon the juices from the saucepan over the fruit until the pudding is filled up to about 2.5cm from the top of the basin.
- Use the remaining bread to make a lid for the pudding. Place a small tea plate on the top and weigh down. I usually find a couple of tins of baked beans, or similar works well.
- Refrigerate overnight. Turn out the pudding just before serving, onto a serving plate by sliding a palette knife carefully between the basin and the pudding. Serve with whipped or clotted cream.

Simon celebrates seafood at Fishstock

Simon Hulstone, head chef at The Elephant in Torquay, will demonstrate how to make the most of Brixham’s seafood when he takes the stage at Fishstock next month.

Fishstock is an annual event aimed at celebrating the seafood industry and raising awareness of sustainable fishing and the challenges facing local fishermen. It includes a music stage, cooking demonstrations, food and craft stands, and activities for children. Funds raised will go towards The Fisherman’s Mission. Simon will lead a 45-minute masterclass at the Castles Kitchen at 1pm on Saturday, September 8. He will create dishes using sustainable Brixham seafood, while providing tips on cooking with less well-known varieties of fish. Simon will then go head-to-head against Andy Sewell of Brix-



ham’s Quayside Hotel, in a *Ready Steady Cook*-style cook-off. The audience will vote for their favourite. “Brixham has a wealth of fantastic seafood and we’re lucky to have it on our doorstep,” says Ben.

To find out more about Simon and The Elephant, visit www.elephantrestaurant.co.uk. For more details about Fishstock visit www.fishstockbrixham.co.uk.