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Chrystal Carver – Baking Made Easy!

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Who doesn't love it when things are easy! Getting the kids out to school without a fuss...nice and easy. Having a smooth day at the office, while that big account closes without a hitch...proud and easy. Coming home from a busy day and whipping up a batch of homemade gooey turtle bars...yes, tasty and easy! In fact, how about baking some oatmeal bars and lemon blackberry tarts, too...all in the same evening. Easy? ABSOLUTELY!

Thanks to Chrystal Carver's savvy baking expertise, she has found a way to create quick and simple gluten-free recipes – based on classic favorites – in her new cookbook, *Sweet & Simple Gluten-Free Baking*. Her time-saving techniques and short ingredient lists (an easy 10 ingredients or less!), make baking year-round a breeze. We were thrilled to get the 411 on what inspired Chrystal to create her cookbook and soak up her tips on how to keep everyday baking easy and delicious!

1. Please give us a little bit about your background. Were you always in the baking field?

I come from a family with a history in cooking and baking. My sister was a chef and I have been an avid baker since I could reach the knobs on the oven. Even though my focus in college was in the engineering field, my time outside of school was spent volunteering and baking. I've spent the last 13+ years focusing on improving business processes and solving problems. The fulfillment I get from solving problems does not stop when I leave the office. I enjoy looking at everything with an improvement mindset, including baking.

2. What inspired you to develop a gluten-free specific cookbook?

A couple of years ago, my girls started developing symptoms we hadn't seen before. They were irritable, had digestive issues, and at one point they stopped eating. After a series of tests, we were informed that they were gluten-intolerant. Not really knowing what to do, we removed all gluten from their diets. Within three weeks, we saw huge improvements. We were so grateful that our girls were happy again, not experiencing discomfort, and they were eating. Before they were diagnosed, I baked weekly. After their diagnosis, I didn't really know what I was going to do because my girls could no longer enjoy my baked treats. I turned to gluten-free cookbooks

and packaged mixes. I found that most gluten-free packaged goods were expensive and they involved a lot of processed ingredients. The cookbooks I purchased required elaborate ingredients or too many steps. With my love for baking and my problem-solving background, I started converting the everyday classic recipes into gluten-free equivalents. One day, my mother-in-law asked me how many recipes I had developed or redeveloped. I told her I had over 80 recipes documented. She recommended that I publish a cookbook. At first I was hesitant. Working full time and raising two girls doesn't leave a lot of time to take on extra projects. But, after some careful consideration, I realized that others might be struggling with the same challenges our daughters faced. So, I decided to develop this cookbook for my girls and for everyone else who is restricted to a gluten-free diet.

3. How long did it take you to develop your cookbook?

It took me about two years to complete my manuscript. Since I already had most of the recipes documented, I spent the majority of my time testing different flour blends, testing recipes, writing the introductory chapters and learning about the publishing process.

4. What are your favorite types of recipes? What is your favorite recipe from the book?



It's so hard to pick a favorite. Every one of them is a favorite of mine at some point, depending on my mood or what type of gathering I'm hosting or attending. My go-to recipes for breakfast are waffles, pancakes, and banana muffins. Those are my girls' favorites. For snacks, I steer towards the fruit-filled oatmeal squares and no-bake granola bars. For gatherings, I like to show off with the turtle bars, lemon blackberry tarts, or mini pumpkin cheesecakes.

5. That's wonderful that the book features low maintenance and simple recipes...great for busy folks! Has this type of easy baking always been your specialty?

Yes, I have always steered towards the simple things. I truly believe we can enjoy all the flavors of life with a few simple ingredients. There are a lot more gluten-free cookbooks available now and each one gets a little easier and provides even more wonderful recipes. I wanted my cookbook to stand out from the rest. The best way to do that was to show people how easy

gluten-free baking can be. With my husband and I working full-time and the girls being active in sports, we need simple recipes to fit into our busy lifestyles.

6. Now that you've mastered the art of preparing these time-saving recipes, what is the one thing you have a little more time to enjoy?

I started spending more time with my girls outdoors. My oldest likes to stay active, so we go for jogs. My youngest is a master at bocce ball and she is currently teaching me her tricks and winning moves. When we are not outside, we are in the kitchen baking...together!

7. What are your three favorite go-to gluten-free ingredients that are kitchen staples in your home?

There are certain ingredients needed as a foundation for most baked goods: flour, milk and butter. I always keep a batch of my gluten-free flour blend on hand and a container of almond milk. Most of my recipes call for butter or oil, so butter competes heavily with coconut oil as the third favorite go-to ingredient. My other three favorite ingredients (not part of the foundation for most of my recipes) would probably be gluten-free chocolate chips, bananas, and pecans.

Sweet & Simple Gluten-Free Baking, \$18.95

Available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and through most bookstores

For more information, go to www.glutenfreepalate.com or www.facebook.com/glutenfreepalate

Want a special sneak peak of what you'll find in Chrystal's cookbook...check out this yummy recipe for gluten-free Turtle Bars!



Photo credit: Mary Bernsen

INGREDIENTS:

For the Crust:

½ cup butter (1 stick)

2 cups all-purpose gluten-free flour blend*

1 cup of brown sugar, packed

1 cup pecan pieces

For the Caramel Layer:

⅔ cup butter

½ cup brown sugar, packed

For the Topping:

1 cup gluten-free chocolate chips

METHOD:

Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Position the oven rack in center of oven.

For the crust:

Using a pastry blender or fork, in a medium mixing bowl combine ½ cup butter, flour and 1 cup brown sugar until the mixture forms fine crumbs. Press the mixture into an ungreased 9x13X2 inch pan. Sprinkle the crust with the pecan pieces; set aside.

For the Carmel Layer:

Combine ⅔ cup butter and ½ brown sugar in a medium saucepan and bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring constantly. Continue to boil for 1 minute.

Drizzle the caramel mixture evenly over the crust. Bake for 20 minutes. Remove from the oven.

Immediately after removing the crust from the oven, sprinkle it with chocolate chips. Allow the chocolate chips to stand for 5-10 minutes so that they will melt. Using the back of a spoon spread

the chocolate evenly over the surface of the bars. Let the bars cool completely before cutting. Store in an airtight container at room temperature.

*For this recipe, Chrystal uses her all-purpose gluten-free rice flour blend that has been prepared in advance. Rather than making a whole batch, you can scale it down to 1 cup white rice flour + ½ cup tapioca flour + ½ cup potato starch.