

Passover Paradise

By Amy Ratner

If you follow the gluten-free diet be sure to visit the Passover aisle at your local supermarket in the next few weeks. It's the next best thing to having an in-store gluten-free bakery.

That's because chametz-wheat, oats, barley, rye and spelt-can not be used in Kosher for Passover foods, with the exception of those that include some form of matzah.

Kosher for Passover products that don't include any form of matzah are always made with gluten-free ingredients. A wonderful, wide array of baked goods made mainly from potato starch shows up on the shelves this time of year as supermarkets try to meet the needs of Jewish shoppers observing Passover.

If you follow the gluten-free diet, you can also safely fill your cart with many Passover items.

You always have to read the label to be sure there is no matzah, matzo, matzoh, matzah meal, matzah cake flour or matzah farfel. If none of these are listed as ingredients, then you know the Kosher for Passover product is gluten free.

Brand names

Some Passover items are labeled "non-gebrokts," which you can use as shorthand for "gluten free" because the label is only used on foods that do not contain any form of matzah.

Gefen and Lieber's brands are often labeled



non-gebrokts. These companies offer ready-made cookies and cakes, as well as mixes. Gefen also sells Passover Wagon Wheel Pasta that is gluten free.

Keep in mind that the rules that result in gluten-free products only apply to Kosher for Passover items and not to products that are simply Kosher.

Passover food makers have become increasingly aware of gluten-free consumers' interest in their products and many are also labeled "gluten free."

Shabtai Gourmet's gluten-free Passover products have become so popular with gluten-free consumers they are now available year round online and in some health food stores. Many supermarkets, including Wegmans and Stew Leonards, carry them for Passover. Shabtai's Ring Ting cupcakes are the closest thing to Hostess HoHo's that you'll find.

Osem, the largest food company in Israel and a major exporter to the US, has branched from Kosher and Kosher for Passover food into the gluten-free market. The company says on its website that it "saw the need for gluten-free products and has been able to provide a solution that includes gluten-free crackers, bagels, dehydrated meals, cake and other products."

One note - Manischewitz brand products tend to contain matzah meal or flour more often than other brands, so pay particular attention to their labels.

A baked goods bonanza

During the eight days of Passover, Jews around the world commemorate Jewish liberation from slavery in Egypt. When the ancient Jews escaped from Egypt, they fled quickly and had no time to wait for their bread to rise. In remembrance of their ancestors' flight, Jews eat only unleavened bread, called matzah, during Passover. And they follow Jewish law that otherwise prohibits chametz.

You'll find all kinds of Passover items in stores located near larger Jewish populations. Kosher markets in particular carry a wide variety of baked goods, including cookies, cakes, brownies, and jelly rolls. Many of the cakes are beautifully



decorated to be special enough for Jews to serve at Passover dinners, called Seders. That makes them perfect for gluten-free special occasions. In addition to Shabtai and Osem, look for products from G&I Kosher Bakery, Goodman's, Kineret, and Greenbaum's. Macaroons made by a number of companies in a variety of flavors are a popular Passover treat and are usually gluten-free.

You can also find cereal, candy, soup, baking mixes and potato starch flour. It's not unusual for those who follow the gluten-free diet to schedule annual trips to kosher markets to stock up on items they can use all year round.

Passover food, like gluten-free food, caters to a specialty market, so prices are typically fairly high. But if you wait until the eight-day Jewish holiday is over, prices plummet as Jewish demand for Passover products disappears. That's when those who follow the gluten-free diet often get the best buys but selection can be limited.

This year Passover begins at sundown on March 28 and ends at nightfall on April 6. Stores begin stocking items for several weeks before the start of Passover. Fresh baked goods usually become available a bit later than non-perishable items so they will last until the first night.

If your supermarket does not have a large selection of Passover items, you can order an increasing number online. Shabtai (www.shabtai-gourmet.com) and Osem (www.osem.co.il/Eng/) have websites. Weberman Foods (www.webermanfoods.com) offers many non-gebrokts products, including seven-layer cake. Likewise, www.aviglat.com sells several brands, including Gefen, Lieber's, and Kineret.

Jewish and gluten free

While Passover is a boon for many who follow the gluten-free diet, it presents some challenges to those who are both gluten free and Jewish.

Matzah is the big problem because it's typically made from wheat and off-limits. That makes it hard for observant gluten-free Jews to fulfill the command that they eat Matzah during the traditional Passover Seder. It also, sadly, makes most matzo ball soup off-limits.

Jewish law says that matzah eaten at the Seder has to be made from one of five grains. All contain gluten, with the exception of oats which are only considered gluten free if they have been processed in a special way to eliminate cross contamination.

Oat matzah made in United Kingdom from specialty gluten-free oats grown in Scotland is available through www.judaism.com. It is handmade and fairly expensive at \$32 to \$40 for a box of three, plus shipping. You can also contact local distributors from a list at www.glutenfreeoatmatzos.com to purchase machine-made oat matzah and matzah meal in addition to the handmade version.

Lakewood Shmura Matzo Bakery in Lakewood, New Jersey, entered the gluten-free oat matzah market last year and continues to offer matzah made from certified gluten-free oats this year. A box of three handmade matzahs is

\$23 plus shipping and can be ordered at www.Lakewoodmatzoh.com.

Jewish law excuses those who have celiac disease from the requirement that Matzah be eaten at the Seder as part of the larger exception for anyone facing a life threatening situation that might be created by following Passover law.

Jews who follow the gluten-free diet and are of Ashkenazi (Eastern European) descent also have to grapple with prohibited "kitniyot," including rice, corn, soy beans, string beans, peas, lentils and mustard, sesame and poppy seeds. Rice and corn, in particular, are mainstays of the gluten-free diet. Kitniyot is banned during Passover because of the possibility that it can be cross-contaminated by chametz. Sephardic Jews (Spanish and Middle Eastern descent) are permitted to eat kitniyot.

Passover Recipes

Passover recipes that do not include any kind of matzah are also gluten free. They often call for potato starch and a lot of eggs to make up for the absence of wheat and any rising agent.

Numerous Passover cookbooks are available at www.amazon.com and in bookstores. You can also find recipes online, including those for gluten-free matzah and matzo balls. Here's a sampling:

On the blog, Gluten Free Bay (<http://tinyurl.com/33w94h>) you will find a round up of Passover recipes that include these two traditional foods, as well as charoset, noodle kugel and many main and side dishes. There are 71 gluten-free Passover recipes on www.recipezaar.com (<http://tinyurl.com/a9kb6a>). Elana's Pantry lists recipes that include squash kugel and Passover torte (<http://tinyurl.com/czt4ap>). On the blog "I am gluten free" there's recipe for matzah using a bread mix. (The mix is made with comstarch and bean flours so it is kitniyot.) The blog includes a YouTube video with step by step instructions (<http://tinyurl.com/ynpsbs>). This post is from 2007 and was updated last year with a full Seder menu with recipes including a new version of matzah (<http://tinyurl.com/avtbhw>).

Matzah Crisp Bread Recipe

Makes 8 to 10 pieces.

1/3 cup ounces ground almonds
2 pinches salt
1/2 cup less 1 tablespoon
potato flour
2 tablespoons soft margarine
2-3 tablespoons cold water
Additional potato flour for
rolling out

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Put almonds, salt and potato flour in bowl. Add margarine and mix with fingers until the mixture resembles fine bread-crumbs. Add 2 tablespoons of water and mix with fork to form a thick paste. Add more water if needed, then knead gently to form a soft dough. Continue kneading until the dough comes clean away from the bowl, sprinkling with extra potato flour if at all sticky. Roll dough to thickness of matzah and cut into squares or triangles. Use a spatula to place on baking sheets lined with parchment paper. Prick evenly all over with a fork. Bake for 8-10 minutes or until a pale gold. Remove from baking sheets and let cool on a wire rack. Store in an airtight container.

From *The Complete International Jewish Cookbook* by Evelyn Rose.

