

Allergen Free Baking - "Birthday parties are back!"

Update May 2008: The cookbook formerly known as The Gak's Snacks Allergy Cookbook recently received a facelift! Now going by the name of Allergen Free Baking, Jill Robbins' collection still includes the same great recipes, but in a more neatly arranged package. Still highly recommended for dairy-free, wheat-free (book does use gluten flours in many recipes, such as barley and spelt), nut-free, and egg-free baking. See the rest of my review below, as it still holds true

By Alisa Fleming, www.GoDairyFree.org - Once you taste the cookies and coffee cakes produced by Gak's Snacks, you won't hesitate to purchase this cookbook. Jill Robbins is the mother of a food allergic child and the founder of Gak's Snacks. Her product line has recently expanded to offer Brownie Chip Cookies, Chocolate Chip Cookies, Apple Coffecakes, and Cranberry Coffeecakes. Having sampled the first three products already, I can vouch that Gak's Snacks has moved to legendary status for very good reason.

Now on to the book...Jill Robbins shares her many baking secrets in this collection of cakes, cookies, breads, muffins, pancakes, and other sweet treats. In total, there are roughly 100 recipes including a few variations. You will find numerous classics, such as Chocolate Birthday Cake, Blueberry Muffins, Zucchini Bread, Vanilla Ice Cream, and Gingerbread People. I also liked the selection of unique, but child-friendly recipes such as Banana Chip Cookies, Peach Muffins, and Tee Hee Hee Cake (I am pretty sure this title is an original).

Before I go into what ingredients are not found in this cookbook, I should note that EVERYONE seems to enjoy these baked goodies, food allergies or not. For those who are on a special diets, Gak's Snacks addresses the following:

- Food Allergies: Each recipe is completely free of dairy, eggs, peanuts, and tree nuts; this is a surprisingly common group of troublemakers for children who suffer with multiple allergies.
- Wheat & Gluten: This is a no-wheat cookbook. Though many of the recipes do use spelt (a relative of wheat) or oats, there are also many recipes using other grains. The author has taken care to note what grains will be needed for each recipe, and if they are gluten-free.
- Soy: Soy lecithin is the only soy ingredient used in this cookbook. Luckily, soy lecithin is not a problem for most individuals with a soy allergy or intolerance.
- Vegan: I only spotted a few recipes with honey (most use maple syrup, molasses, or other sweetener), so I would not hesitate to recommend this cookbook to vegans.

The recipes are all one-of-a-kind, from scratch creations (no convenience foods utilized). Jill Robbins goes to extra lengths to use healthy ingredients, even calling for oil rather than specialty shortening or butter. Yet, as to be expected, some of the ingredients are a bit less common. Xanthan gum, spelt flour, tapioca starch, and soy lecithin powder, just to name a few. If you have trouble finding any of the ingredients used in this cookbook, most are sold directly on the Gak's Snacks website. I have priced around a bit. Though you may be able to find some of them on Amazon for a better price in large quantities, the prices at Gak's are pretty fair (competitive with in-store pricing), and smaller quantities are available.

The book is spiral bound (awesome for kitchen use), the print is nice and big, and the instructions are easy to follow. The formatting of the book as a whole could use some readjusting, but this doesn't seem to take away from the content.

For anyone who entertains or lives with food allergic little ones, throws birthday parties, or sends treats off to school to share with the class, this cookbook should be at hand. Trust me, the whole gang will gobble these goodies up. And when you are hosting a selection of children who may or may not have food allergies or a special diet, better safe than sorry.

This cookbook is available from:

- Gak's Snacks