

Flour Power: What you 'knead' to know to have it

By Ben Birkett, North Farm Sales Manager

Are you confused by flours and baking additives with names unfamiliar to you? There was a time when baking bread was a simple tradition of blending flour, water, honey or malt, salt and yeast. Today things are more complicated.

Whether you are a long-time baker or a novice with a bread machine, here's a guide to help you through the 'mix' of baking products and give you some 'flour power'.

Wheat Flours

Bread Flour—Made from *hard wheat* which is naturally high in gluten. Bread flour is also referred to as 'high gluten' flour. It is also simply known as 'flour' as opposed to 'pastry flour'. Most flours not listed as pastry or all-purpose are assumed to be made from hard wheat.

Pastry—Made from *soft wheat* which is lower in gluten, hence less sticky and more flaky.

Graham—A variation of wheat flour with great flavor. It is low in gluten making it best suited for pastry.

All-Purpose—May be used to make bread but will need to be fortified with additional gluten. It is often a blend of hard and soft wheat.

Unbleached—"Wheat" or "White"—Milled and processed to remove fiber and germ the same as regular bleached flours but it has not been bleached. Unless specifically designated as hard wheat or bread flour, this is an all-purpose flour. It may be used for bread but in a blend and may require added gluten.

Semolina—A processed wheat flour designed for use in making pasta and not suitable for bread making. It is a durum wheat cooked prior to being milled into a flour.

Non-Wheat Flours

These are often used for flavor, variety and/or dietary restriction. Note the distinction between 'non-wheat' and 'gluten-free' due to the serious

nature of allergies and other dietary restrictions. Both *non-wheat* and *gluten-free* must be blended with other grains and/or gums to produce bread.

Amaranth—A very fine flour more suited to pastry than bread. It is mildly bitter and is better in blends.

Barley—Closely related to wheat flour and it makes a good bread.

Buckwheat—More akin to Amaranth than to wheat flour, it is very nutritious and flavorful.

Oat—May be used in blends to eliminate or reduce wheat. It will improve the consistency of bread by improving its elasticity.

Rye—Makes a delicious and hearty bread used alone or in blends.

Spelt—A close relative to the wheat flours used today. It is high in protein and has a decent gluten content suitable for bread making.

Gluten-Free Flours

These contain no gluten and therefore must be fortified with xanthan gum to have the elasticity required to make a decent bread. Typically fine and difficult to work with, they are often blended with corn, potato and/or tapioca starch flours to improve the texture.

Arrowroot Starch—May be used in blends with other gluten-free flours in bread making.

Corn—Also known as masa flour. Its many traditional uses include corn chips, tamales and tortillas.

Garbanzo Bean—Must be blended.

Quinoa—Must be blended.

Rice—Virtually hypo-allergenic, meaning that most people can safely consume products made from it.

Soy Bean—Suitable for blending with other gluten-free flours to make wheat-free breads and may be used to fortify any bread.

Tapioca—Virtually hypo-allergenic.

Bread-Making Additives

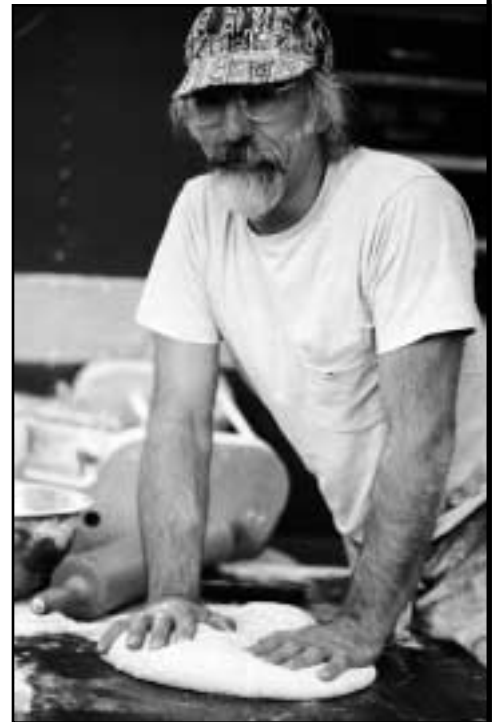
Cracked Wheat—A suitable adjunct

grain to use in your bread recipes. (Note that the cracked grains will need additional moisture and time to achieve optimal texture.)

Vital Wheat Gluten—Not the same as a high-gluten flour. This product is gluten which has been isolated from flour and is used to create a more elastic and moist bread that resists crumbling.

Gums—Used to replace gluten in breads made with flours that contain no gluten.

Xanthan Gum—This is the gum most often used to replace gluten. It is expensive at \$12-\$16 per pound, but only about 1 teaspoon per loaf of bread is required. If you have had little success in making gluten-free bread you will find that this additive will help reduce crumbling.



Flour Power

You have the knowledge—you have the power. Remember these guidelines and you will be baking better. May your kitchen be filled with warmth, sweet smells and delicious, fresh and healthful foods.

