

COOKING WORK-AROUNDS AND SUBSTITUTIONS

I know that it can be frustrating when it's hard to get consistent access to the ingredients we've come to rely on - and take for granted. And - it's a rather new ballgame to learn how to plan for, and shop for, a basic variety of goods for cooking nutritious, balanced meals. Not to mention how challenging it is to be learning on the fly how to work with what you have in the pantry, or work with what's available in the grocery store!

You can make so many things when you don't have *all* of the recipe ingredients. I'm going to throw out some random things and options for substitutions and work-arounds to help you feel more empowered to make adjustments and trust that things will work out well and taste really darn good.

BASIC FLAVORINGS AND SPICES

Fresh garlic

Dehydrated minced garlic is your best bet, garlic powder second. Jarred minced garlic or garlic in a tube adds a vinegary/metallic flavor which makes it a last choice for substitution in most recipes. Use 1 teaspoon dehydrated minced garlic for 2 cloves fresh garlic. Use 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder for 2 cloves garlic. Garlic salt is not a good substitute, but if you have to use it, use even less and omit salt from the recipe before tasting and adding salt if needed.

Fresh onion

Use dehydrated minced onion if possible. Use 1/4 the amount of dehydrated minced onion (1/4 cup dry to 1 cup fresh) or, if you have a garden, substitute fresh chives. For truly desperate times, use onion powder - 1 tablespoon onion powder to 1 onion (or one cup onion). Onion salt is not a good substitute, but if you have to use it, omit salt from the recipe before tasting and adding salt if needed.

Fresh parsley

You can get away with dried parsley for this, but add it as an ingredient, not as a final garnish. Sub 2 tablespoons fresh parsley for 1 tablespoon dry. You can also just skip it if it's called for as a garnish.

Fresh cilantro

Skip it if you don't have it. Brighten up a dish to finish with a little bit of lemon, lime, or a little apple cider vinegar.

Fresh jalapeño

Substitute red chile pepper flakes.

Fresh basil

Weep? (But don't sub dried basil.)

Other fresh herbs and dried substitutions

The rule of thumb is to use LESS dried herb than fresh. Substitute about 1/3 dried for the called for fresh herb. (1 tablespoon fresh thyme = 1 teaspoon dried)

Exception - use dried dill 1:1 for fresh

VEGETABLE SWAPS

Carrots

If you need these for the base of a recipe (making soup) but don't have them, but do have onions, use a lower heat than usual and sauté onions longer to add sweetness. In a stew, you can substitute sweet potatoes.

Sweet Potatoes

Substitute carrots as-is in a cooked recipe. For a roasted equivalent, toss 1/2" cubes of carrots in olive or coconut oil and roast at 400°F for 20-25 minutes until tender and just starting to caramelize. Can also substitute potatoes.

Celery

If a soup calls for this, but you only have carrots, onions and garlic, then just go ahead and make it without. A good vegetarian bouillon cube will also help to balance out the flavors.

VINEGARS + CITRUS + ACID

Red wine vinegar

Can sub white wine vinegar or apple cider vinegar. Don't sub white vinegar.

White wine vinegar

Substitute apple cider vinegar

Out of all vinegar except for white vinegar

Use white vinegar with a pinch of sugar (1 teaspoon white vinegar plus 1/8 teaspoon sugar. 1 tablespoon white vinegar plus a scant teaspoon sugar.)

Lemon or lime

Substitute apple cider vinegar or white wine vinegar or omit. Prepared lemon or lime juice is not a great equivalent in flavor to fresh lemon or lime juice, especially as a salad dressing ingredient or garnish.

Wine in recipes

Use white vermouth as a 1:1 substitute for white wine in cooking, and red vermouth 1:1 for red wine in cooking. Wine can also be omitted from recipes, and acid increased by using about two teaspoons to one tablespoon of white wine vinegar, red wine vinegar or fresh lemon juice for 1 cup of wine in the recipe. Start with a small amount, and taste, before adding more.

OILS AND BUTTER

Best fat to use for higher heat cooking, high heat roasting, plus Indian, Mexican or Southeast Asian recipes: coconut oil (use virgin/unrefined for regular cooking; use refined for frying)

Best fat to use for Mediterranean (Italian, Greek, French) cooking:

Olive oil

Which olive oil to choose:

Extra-virgin olive oil - for low to medium temp cooking, for salad dressings, for finishing a dish, for baking vegetables at 400° or below.

Olive oil - for high heat cooking or large quantity marinade

Pomace oil - a low quality oil, would generally avoid

If you DON'T have butter or wish to make a vegan version in soups - or sauces that need thickening: use olive oil. Oil and flour can be slowly sautéed to make a nutty flavored roux.

Oils to avoid for health reasons: any oil that hasn't been around for a thousand years - canola, safflower, peanut, corn. Frying anything in oil is never a good idea for health, period.

Grapeseed and rice bran oils are okay for high-heat cooking. I think avocado oil tastes weird, personally, and would always rather use olive oil for a liquid oil.

OILS AND BUTTER IN BAKING

Quick breads, cakes, muffins, pancakes, waffles:

When the recipe calls for "melted butter", substitute olive oil (this is surprising, but the fruitiness of olive oil is great in cake). If the *cake* recipe calls for softened butter, you can sub oil 1:1 and whip it with the sugar and eggs until it turns lighter colored and a little thicker.

If you want to substitute applesauce for oil or butter, you can swap 1:1 and add 1/8 cup more flour. The texture will be extremely moist and the shelf life will be greatly reduced. Best to eat on same day.

Cookies: use half coconut oil and half tahini or use a butter substitute like Nutiva's Organic Shortening (a combination of sustainably grown/harvested red palm oil and coconut oil). Avoid "stick" substitutes like Earth Balance "butter".

DAIRY

In baking:

Milk adds tenderness in baking, while buttermilk and yogurt add tenderness *but also* contribute to leavening (helping the protein molecules build on themselves and to make the mixture rise during baking).

Milk in baking:

1. Substitute powdered dried milk, rehydrated with water per the formula on the packet
2. Substitute water
3. Substitute coconut milk and skip the dairy: Mix 1 can coconut milk with 2 1/4 cups water. Oat milk is also a great substitute for dairy milk in baking.

Buttermilk or yogurt in baking:

1. If you have milk (or powdered dry milk): add 1 teaspoon white vinegar or fresh lemon juice to 2 cups of milk to equal 2 cups buttermilk or yogurt.
2. Swap whole milk yogurt for buttermilk
3. If you prefer to make a dairy-free version, use canned coconut milk:
Dilute the canned coconut milk by add 1 teaspoon white vinegar or fresh lemon juice to 2 cups coconut milk (coconut milk diluted from canned by mixing one can with 2 1/4 cups water).

Crème Fraîche in a recipe or as a garnish: use sour cream or whole milk plain yogurt (or omit if it is a garnish). If you have whole fat (heavy whipping cream) cream, you can make your own crème fraîche by using this classic trick: add two tablespoons real buttermilk to two cups heavy cream. Set this on top of your refrigerator - or in the warmest part of the kitchen - and allow it to thicken slowly over the course of 8 hours, or up to 24 hours if your house is chilly.

Eggs

If you are out of eggs, or want a vegan substitute:

Mix 1 tablespoon GROUND flaxseed with three tablespoons water, let sit for 5 - 10 minutes and add to recipe.

Mix 1 tablespoon GROUND chia seeds with three tablespoons water, let sit for 15 minutes and add to recipe.

In cookies, and even some cakes, you can generally get away with one less egg than the recipe calls for.

SWEETENERS

In baking:

Honey can be substituted for sugar in a baked recipe although the whole recipe will taste predominately like honey.

How to substitute honey for sugar:

Use 1/2 cup or 2/3 cup honey per 1 cup of sugar, and reduce other liquid in the recipe (dairy or water) by 1/4 (if the recipe calls for 1 cup buttermilk, reduce it to 3/4 cup.) Honey will prevent cookies from becoming crisp and the cookies will burn more easily, so reduce oven temperature (from 350° to 325° for typical cookies) and add a pinch of baking soda and 2-3 tablespoons cornstarch or tapioca starch to the recipe for crispness.

Maple syrup is NOT a good substitute in baking (or pudding-making) when the recipe contains eggs - the mixture will not rise or thicken.

Agave syrup can be substituted for sugar, but there is no great nutritional advantage to using agave over sugar, with the exception of organic **raw** agave. Follow the same rules as when using honey.

Brown rice syrup is also not nutritionally great, but very useful when it comes to making homemade snack bars or energy bars (that aren't baked) because it's really good and sticky and helps bind everything together.

BENEFICIAL SUBSTITUTES FOR SUGAR IN BAKING

Coconut sugar: use this for cookies (not brownies, quick breads or cake) and swap out 3/4:1 or 1:1 for sugar

Maple sugar: use this for cookies, quick breads or cakes and swap out 3/4:1 for sugar (i.e. use less maple sugar because it is sweeter.) I don't recommend using any sugar substitutes for brownies.

I have found that Lo Han (Monkfruit) is a digestive gut bomb nightmare when substituted for sugar in baking. This is just anecdotal information.

Equal portions of maple syrup (or honey or agave syrup), coconut oil and peanut or nut butter can take the place of the sugar, egg and fat in a cookie recipe.

BAKING - WHEAT FREE AND YEAST FREE

Converting flour recipes to gluten-free flour recipes in baking:

1. For **pancakes and waffles**, substitute gluten-free flour for wheat flour 1:1 with no other changes.
2. For **cookies**, substitute gluten-free flour for wheat flour 1:1 and also add 1/4 teaspoon xanthan gum to the dry ingredients before mixing.
3. For **cakes, quick breads and pizza**: it's really best to source gluten-free specific recipes rather than substitute 1:1 because the methods and ratios are different enough to make success very variable. See end of this blog for a gluten-free pizza/flatbread recipe.

Yeast:

For baking bread, the best substitute would be to get a little sourdough starter from a friend or start your own sourdough starter and go from there.

OR - choose a baking soda-specific bread, like a quick bread (cornbread) or Irish soda bread

Pizza can be made as a non-yeast leavened flatbread. See recipe below for Umbrian Griddle Bread which can also be cooked, cooled, topped and baked as a pizza/flatbread.

Powdered yeast will last for a long time in the little packets, or up to a year in a glass container in the refrigerator. Do not freeze.

Baking soda should be replaced often for best baking results.

Ciaccia or Torta al Testa (Yeast-Free Umbrian Griddle Bread)

makes 6 six-inch flatbreads

2 1/4 cups unbleached bread flour, spelt flour (or gluten-free flour with 1/4 tsp. xanthan gum added)
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
1 cup warm water or milk (around 100° - 110°F)

Equipment baking prep: preheat a baking stone set in the lower half of a 425° oven for 45 minutes OR heat a cast-iron griddle set over a medium-high flame for several minutes until hot

1. In a medium bowl, mix together the flour, baking soda and salt. Add the liquid and mix well, first with a wooden spoon and then with your hands, until you can form a ball of dough. The dough should be soft and tender but firm - as soft as a baby's bottom.
2. Divide dough into 6 equal portions and form each portion into a ball. Cover the balls with a kitchen towel and let them rest for 15-30 minutes to allow the dough to relax and be easier to roll out without springing back.

3. On a floured surface, flatten out one ball at a time and then using a rolling pin, roll each disk into a 1/8" thick round-ish disk.

4. If using a baking stone in the oven, transfer the griddle bread to the baking stone with a pizza peel or with a flat cookie sheet and bake for about 2 minutes per side, about 4-5 minutes total until the bread is dark golden but not blackened.

If using a cast-iron skillet, test the heat of the skillet by sprinkling a little pinch of flour on the pan surface and waiting for the flour to darken in color. When it darkens, the pan is hot and ready to use. Bake the flatbread for about 2 minutes per side, about 4-5 minutes total until the bread is dark golden but not blackened.

Serve each flatbread immediately or keep warm under a kitchen towel until all of the flatbreads are ready. You can also top cooled flatbreads like a pizza and rebake (now or later) in a 375°-400°F oven.

Gluten-Free Focaccia/Pizza Crust

Yield: one 12" flatbread or pizza

7/8 cup warm water (105-115°F)

2 1/2 teaspoons (1 package) fast-acting yeast

1 teaspoon honey

1 teaspoon olive oil, plus olive oil for greasing the baking pan

1 1/2 cup (6.3 ounces) gluten-free flour mix (I like Bob's Red Mill baking mix)

2 tablespoons ground flaxseed

1 teaspoon xanthan gum

3/4 teaspoon salt

Lightly oil an 11 or 12" pizza pan or a heavy quarter sheet baking pan and set aside.

Combine water, yeast and honey with 1 teaspoon oil and proof until bubbly. Mix flours, xanthan gum, and salt in a large bowl with a whisk. Add the yeast mixture to the flour mixture and stir well with a wooden spoon until a smooth dough forms. Spread dough in the oiled pan and use an oiled silicone scraper to spread to edges of pan in a 1/4" thick layer. Oil the top of the dough and loosely cover pan with a second baking pan or pizza pan to protect from the air. Let rise for 40 minutes.

Preheat oven to 400°F (about 20 minutes before the dough has finished rising).

Bake the flatbread in the lower third of the oven until golden, about 12 minutes. Remove from oven and brush with extra-virgin olive oil and good sea salt. Serve hot or at room temperature. To bake with toppings, bake for 12 minutes, then remove from the oven, top with desired ingredients, and bake for an additional 6-8 minutes until bubbly, about 12 minutes. Remove from oven and brush with extra-virgin olive oil and good sea salt to serve as a focaccia. If topping with Parmesan, sprinkle up to 1/2 cup and return to oven for an additional 6 minutes.

To continue as a pizza, top crust with sauce or toppings of your choice. Return to oven and bake until toppings are heated through or hot and bubbly, about 8 minutes. Cut and serve.

