

Why Xanthan Gum?

Nearly all recipes using gluten-free flour for baking requires xanthan gum. The reason for this is that without the xanthan gum the ingredients will not become dough. VERY IMPORTANT: if you forget to add the xanthan gum when the recipe requires it (typically with the dry ingredients), it will not work even if you add it later. The natural gluten found in wheat and other grain flours provides the stickiness that helps hold baked goods together. That gluten or glue coupled with the egg(s) makes the cake stand and the cookies stay together. Without gluten, things just fall apart.

However, gluten is also the allergen which celiac patients are the most susceptible. It irritates the villi (tiny hair-like fingers that help digest food) in the small intestine to the point that nutrients cannot be absorbed into the body. Over 300 symptoms of illness have been linked to gluten intolerance.

Xanthan Gum was actually created by the United States Department of Agriculture in the late 1950's and early 1960's. In 1968 it was approved by the FDA for use in cooking and baking. By using the process of fermentation it was found that glucose or sucrose can be used to thicken watery ingredients like gravy and cause flours to "stick together." We use very little xanthan gum in baking. As you will see in my recipes, it is usually the least of all the ingredients, but it is the most important in holding things together. Be sure to put the xanthan gum in the mixture with the other dry ingredients when the recipe says to do so.

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