

notable edibles



Jessica's Natural Foods: Gluten-Free Comfort

When Jessica Mindell's husband, Jeff, cut gluten out of his diet, he had one request: Could she make him a gluten-free version of her homemade granola?

"I love to bake, I'm passionate about it," says Jessica. But when Jeff decided to change his eating habits, "no one was selling a gluten-free, oat-based granola."

An engineer by trade, she began tinkering and testing in her spare time to get the mix exactly right. "I started experimenting in my home kitchen. I'd make three to five batches of granola, pack it up in plastic bags and give it to friends, and I kept honing, tweaking, doing blind taste tests."

Not only did she hit on a version that people loved to eat, her timing was

great: Searches for gluten-free alternatives began to soar in the late 2000s.

Producing on a large scale meant finding a certified gluten-free facility that could process larger amounts. In the beginning that meant driving to Chicago once a month.

"I had to go that far to find an entirely gluten-free bakery. I'd go, make the granola, package it, load up my SUV, and come home. One time, I drove home in a blizzard, and it was really scary. I said, 'I've got to find something else.'"

Fortunately, she can now choose from a number of gluten-free facilities closer to home—a big help now that she's expanded her

offerings and is currently selling in over 25 states. In addition to six flavors of granola—including Almond Cherry and Chocolate Chip—she's developed a new line of baking mixes for cookies, cakes, muffins and an all-purpose gluten-free flour that can be swapped one-to-one with the wheat-based version.

"It turns out that rice is high in arsenic," says Jessica. "If you're not gluten-free, it's not a big deal because a lot of people don't consume that much rice. But if you are, so many available gluten-free [foods] are rice-based. We started to hear from people who were concerned about that."

After intense experimentation she landed on teff, an ancient gluten-free grain used in Ethiopian cooking, as the base of her mixes. She orders it from a farm in Idaho.

"Whatever I create has to be nutritious,

and it has to have a nice texture and flavor," says Jessica. That holds true for Organic Strawberry Syrup, another Jeff idea as a way to get their kids to drink more milk. The syrup gets its color from beet juice, its flavor from organic strawberries and has also proven popular with adults who use it to sweeten ice tea and yogurt.

The Mindells agree, however, that the most important ingredient of all is gratitude. "Giving back is really important to us, and as corny as it sounds, we want to make the world a better place," says Jessica; 5% of all profits go to a variety of organizations, including Gleaners, the Celiac Disease Institute and the Animal Welfare Institute.

To find Jessica's products, use the store locator on the website, or order online. Be ready for what may be the best granola you've ever eaten—with or without gluten.

— Nan Bauer

Learn more at JessicasNaturalfoods.com



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