

# better nutrition

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## slimming foods

WHAT'S HOT | FOOD

### baking with agave

Have your cake and eat it too: life is sweeter with this all-natural, good for you sugar alternative

By Christine Gable



#### Forget the sugar

blues. With all the goodness but none of the downsides of table sugar, agave nectar holds the key to eating well- and taking care of yourself at the same time. "Agave nectar is a very versatile sweetener that anyone can use with ease," says Ania Catalano, a natural foods chef and author of *Baking with Agave Nectar*. "It is one of the best, low-glycemic, whole-food sweeteners that works wonderfully as a refined-sugar substitute with no strong, distinct flavor or aftertaste."

#### Agave's Sweet Rewards

The indigenous people of Mexico traditionally gathered the sweet organic juice-aguamiel—from the blue agave plant. Thanks to the high levels of polyfructose, the plant yields a simple fructose and dextrose syrup, which, before bottling, is converted via an enzymatic process to something sweeter than sugar. "You need less to achieve the same level of sweetness," says Catalano, "usually 3/4 cup of agave, for 1 cup of sugar."

With only 45 calories and 11 g of carbohydrates per tablespoon, agave helps those who want- or need- to slash their sugar intake." Agave nectars are low-glycemic sweeteners, therefore producing much less dramatic fluctuations in blood glucose and insulin levels," says Catalano. "Health experts agree that controlling these levels is

a critical component in lowering the risks for heart disease and diabetes, as well as reducing cholesterol levels and managing weight." Agave also contains minerals, including calcium, iron, magnesium, and potassium.

lemonade, or other beverages, and can be added to salad dressings and barbecue sauces. Any way you look at it, agave is a win-win.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

You can substitute agave nectar for honey or maple syrup in most recipes, depending on your preference: Replace each cup of honey or maple syrup with 1 cup of agave nectar.

And forget pulling out the container to find a crystallized mass- with a shelf life of one year at room temperature, agave pours easily and dissolves quickly. However, Catalano cautions: "One must bake at a lower temperature when using agave, since things tend to brown quicker. Set oven temperatures 25 degrees lower to achieve optimal results." Agave nectar is an all-natural ticket to moist, flavorful muffins, cakes, and cookies. Many bakers believe agave yields a silkier, smoother texture to baking goods. This sweetener also works great in coffee, tea,



#### Light or Dark?

Agave nectar comes in light and dark varieties. Here's a look at both:

**Light:** A mild, neutral flavor that does not change the taste of foods; ideal for sweetening coffee, tea, fruit smoothies, etc.

**Dark/Amber:** Compared to maple syrup and caramel; great for baking.