

Why You Should Use Be Measuring Your Gluten Free Recipes By Weight

By: Mary Frances at Gluten Free Cooking School

When you open up a cookbook or get a recipe off of the internet, how do you know that it will work? How do you know that the brownie recipe that you're about to make will be a brownie, and not a chocolate cake? Is it even possible to evaluate a recipe without actually cooking it?

Using Ratios:

I think that it is possible. And I think so, because I read Michael Ruhlman's "Ratio: The Simple Codes Behind the Craft of Everyday Cooking" The recipes for most of the basic foods that we all love – cake, bread, biscuits, cookies, etc – can be reduced to a simple ratio of ingredients.

Cookies are 1 part sugar: 2 parts fat: 3 parts flour. To make pie crust dough, just switch the sugar for water so that you have 3 parts flour, 2 parts fat, 1 part water. Easy enough, right? Well, there are a couple of complications.

First, these ratios are all by weight, not by volume. So, if you use measuring cups for your baking, the ratios will be different. A kitchen scale, preferably a digital one, is needed.

Second, the ratios assume that you are using plain all-purpose wheat flour. If you're using a gluten free flour mix that closely mimics wheat flour, then you're all set. But, if you're preferred flour mix doesn't act like wheat flour, then you may have to adjust the ratios a bit. I'll come back to this in a bit.

Why I Decided to Use a Scale:

Before I can figure out exactly how these ratios work with my flour mix, I had to start using a digital scale to measure how much flour I was using in my recipes. I had resisted buying a scale for a while. My recipes worked fine for me, so why would I need one?

I finally changed my mind for two reasons. First, even though my recipes work well for me, there is always someone that they don't work for. For every 20 favorable comments on my gluten free biscuits post, there is probably one comment from someone who ended up with gloopy, runny dough. Why? Because when they measured out 2.5 cups of flour, they did not end up with the same amount of flour as I do when I measure out 2.5 cups of flour.

In Ratio, Ruhlman says that 1 cup of flour can weigh anywhere from 4 – 6 oz. If you're making a recipe that calls for 4 cups of flour, as my gluten free bagel recipes does, then you may end up using somewhere between 16 oz of flour and 24 oz of flour. The person that measures out 24 oz. of flour is using 50% more flour than the person who measured out 16 oz. That's a BIG difference.

Since gluten free flours are so very expensive, I wanted to be able to write recipes that everyone could follow EXACTLY, if they chose too. If they choose to follow the weight measurements, then they are much more likely to get the same results that I do....and to get consistent results each time they make that recipe.

The second reason that I've started using a kitchen scale, is that it's so much freakin' fun. I love understanding how recipes work, and when you measure what flours you're using and what the relative ratios of ingredients are. This make is easier to learn about gluten free baking.

Here's an example: The ratio that Ruhlman gives for bread is 5 parts flour, 3 parts water (plus yeast and salt). When I measured the ingredients in Finally, Really Good Sandwich Bread, the ratios were 5 parts flour to 5 parts water. What does that mean? Well, I think it means that my flour mix is more absorbent than all-purpose wheat flour.

Knowing this informs my choice of how to adjust other recipes. When I switched out the masa harina in my flour mix with almond flour, I knew that I would need to decrease the water in my recipe because almond flour is less absorbent than masa harina. This saved me at least one failed loaf of bread bread!

Why You Should Start Using a Scale:

The more I learn about gluten free baking, the more that I wish we would all use weight measurements. I truly believe that doing so would exponentially increase the rate at which we, as a gluten free community, discover how to make gluten free baking truly shine. And, I think that using scales would greatly decrease the frustration and wasted money that many of you have experienced when you've tried to bake.

I saw a discussion on Facebook the other night in which a group of gluten free individuals were discussing the relative merits of using a scale or continuing with measuring cups. I was really surprised by how many people had a negative view of using a digital scale. The tone of the conversation seemed to be, "I've been doing it this way for 10 years and it's worked just fine, so why change? Or, "Good cooks don't need to measure, they just know when it's right."

I'll admit, I can see their point of view. Heaven knows, I don't measure when I'm cooking. And I've already said that it took me a while to see the value in using a scale. But how do you know that using a scale is not better, if you haven't tried it? And all of those people that can make biscuits without measuring anything, can only do that because they used to measure it and they've measured it so many times that they know how much flour and milk and butter to use, and how to adjust if they put in a little too much flour.

And let's be honest. There are plenty of people who are not comfortable in the kitchen without a recipe to follow. And they want to follow it exactly. The thought of improvising ingredients or not measuring every teaspoon of salt, yeast and sugar completely freaks them out. For these people especially, recipes written by weight would be an extra comfort.

Using a scale doesn't make me a better cook or baker than anyone else. It's just a tool that helps me learn and helps me gain consistent results. A good quality digital kitchen scale that tares (resets to zero when you already have something on the scale) can be purchased for less than \$30. That is not out of the price range for most home cooks. And if having that digital scale prevents you from making two or three gluten free doorstops over the course of the year, then it's paid for itself.

What I'll Do Now: So for now, I'm making all of my new recipes by weight. Though, I'll still figure out the volumetric measurements too, for those who want to stick to cups. And, as I cook my old recipes, I'll be figuring out the weight measurements for those too. If you've been thinking about buying a [digital scale](#), that link goes to the one that I have and it's only \$25 and has free shipping with Amazon Prime.

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