

Some Alternatives to Using White Sugar in your favorite recipes

"Sugar is nothing but a chemical. They take the juice of the cane or beet and refine it to molasses and then they refine it to brown sugar and finally to strange white crystals."
~William Duffy, author of Sugar Blues



When I asked Melissa if I could write an article about white sugar and alternatives to it, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. There are countless articles on white sugar floating around the internet, the majority of them quite hostile towards the "stuff." In fact, I've seen it called everything from poison, to "white death."

I thought at first about taking the time to spell out reasons white sugar is so demonized in natural health circles, but realized I'd probably be "preaching to the choir," and didn't want to waste time telling you what you already know. So, with the holidays approaching fast, I'm going to instead focus on (just a few of the many) alternatives to

using white sugar for your favorite holiday recipes, starting with my personal favorite substitutes and finishing with some of the sweeteners Melissa uses in her delicious sweet treat recipes!

By the way, if you are a baking novice like me, stick with direct substitutes of granular for granular sweeteners (ex. *honey crystals for white sugar*) and liquid for liquid sweeteners (ex. *honey for corn syrup*.) It's a bit safer this way, and every bit as delicious! If you're not sure you have the guts (or the time) to experiment with your holiday faves, though, pick up Melissa's new cookbook "*Melt in Your Mouth*," and try some of her proven treats! She's taken all the guesswork out for us!

1. Sucanat

Sucanat stands for **S**ugar **C**ane **N**atural and is essentially a whole unrefined cane sugar. Sugar cane juice is extracted from fresh cut sugar cane and heated in a large vat. The juice is reduced to a rich, dark syrup, and then it is hand-paddled, which allows for the syrup to cool and dry, resulting in the dry, porous granules we call Sucanat. *Absolutely nothing is added to this product, and nothing is taken out!*

Since Sucanat still contains all of the cane's natural molasses, it is marked by a deep brown color and a distinct, natural molasses flavor. Needless to say, it is best to use sucanat as a substitute for brown sugar in your recipes. (I use it most for BBQ sauces and marinades).

Easy BBQ Sauce

½ C organic ketchup + 3 T sucanat
Mix together and enjoy

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[Did you know? Sucanat is naturally gluten-free, vegan, and kosher, plus it contains trace amounts of iron, calcium, vitamin B6, potassium and chromium!]

[Sucanat can be substituted 1:1 in your recipes that use brown sugar]

2. Honey Granules

Honey granules are made from a combination of Sucanat and a bit of honey in order to lighten the color and texture of the final product. It offers, in my opinion, the most accurate 1:1 natural sweetener swap for white sugar. In fact, I have successfully converted 99.9% of my baked good recipes to using this sweetener in place of white sugar.

Did you know? You can even powder Honey Granules in a blender or coffee grinder to reach a texture similar to refined white powdered sugar. The color will be deeper, but the texture enables us to still make a great cookie frosting or cinnamon/sugar to sprinkle on buttered toast! Yum!

To make Powdered Honey Granules:

1 cup of Honey Granules will yield 1 cup of Powdered Honey Granules.

Measure the amount needed into the bowl of a blender (or coffee grinder for small quantities, I use the "Magic Bullet.") Cover and blend on high speed. You may need to stop every 10-15 seconds to shuffle the granules around until you reach an even fine powder, but avoid over-blending, which can start to melt the granules. **notes: Allow some time for the dust to settle before removing the lid or you'll get a face full! You can store your powdered honey granules in an airtight glass container for several months. Warm temperatures*

may cause the powder to harden. If they do harden, simply re-process in the blender.

The best place to source Honey Granules is from Bread Beckers (www.breadbeckers.com). They are located in GA but ship to any US destination.

3. Maple Syrup

Just so we're clear, I'm talking here about Real Maple Syrup, the kind that actually comes from the maple tree, as opposed to Fake Maple Syrup, which is nothing more than colored (HFCS) sugar water produced artificially in a factory.

You may already know that there are several different "grades" of maple syrup, but you may not know that these grades generally depend on the color of the syrup.

In the United States, maple syrup is either classified as Grade A or Grade B.

- **Grade A** is further categorized into 3 groups: *Light Amber, Medium Amber and Dark Amber.*
- **Grade B** is the darkest of them all

The darker syrups are made from sap that is extracted later in the harvesting season. They have a stronger maple flavor and are best used for cooking/baking, while the lighter ones' preferred use is as syrup for waffles and pancakes, etc.

[Substitute Real Maple Syrup 1:1 for any liquid sweetener in your recipe]

4. Maple Crystals

Maple Crystals are simply dehydrated Real Maple Syrup. They can substitute 1:1 for white sugar,

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however they tend to add an additional soft fluffiness to the texture. Several people sprinkle this sweetener on their morning oatmeal and claim that the taste is unmistakably maple and amazing!

5. Agave (pronounced Ah-GAH-vay)

The nectar made from the Agave plant is often called "honey water," and is produced from the sap extracted from the core of the plant. The sap is filtered and heated at a low temperature, which breaks down the carbohydrates into sugars. Raw food enthusiasts regard agave nectar as a raw food because of the low temperatures used in processing (under 118°F).

Lately agave has been given a bad rap based on its higher fructose levels, some going as far as comparing it to High Fructose Corn Syrup. However, I'm not sure that's a fair assessment. Agave syrup taps the naturally occurring fructose available in the agave plant, whereas HFCS is a highly manufactured food ingredient made from corn syrup, which is usually produced from genetically modified (GMO) corn. Keep in mind also that fructose is not a toxin, and the mere fact that it is metabolized in the liver does not mean that it is a poison. Here's an excerpt from Melissa's *Melt in Your Mouth* cookbook: "Agave is a natural sweetener produced from the sap of the agave plant. Contrary to the latest fad claims, the fructose level in most agaves is similar to that of a glass of apple or pear juice. Again, it's still a sweetener and should be used moderately. Using organic agave from a reputable source such as that from a health food store, is usually a safe choice."

Okay, so, tell me what this stuff tastes like:

One website compared the taste of agave nectar to honey, albeit mentioning they are not *identical* in flavor. Therefore, they claim, "many people who do not like the taste of honey find agave a more palatable choice." It also lacks the bitter aftertaste associated with most artificial sweeteners.

Like maple syrup, agave nectar is also offered in light and dark varieties. The lighter nectars are more mildly flavored and are (apparently) the preferred choice for many bakers. The darker syrups are much stronger in flavor.

6. Honey

Melissa says, "Honey is the oldest sweetener around. It dates back to biblical times and was known then, and is still known now, as a healing food. Local organic honey is your best option, still, honey from a reputable source is better than mass-produced honey from a big box store, even if it isn't local."

The nectar source of honeybees will affect the color, flavor, and even aroma of a particular variety of honey. Color may range from nearly colorless to dark brown, and the flavor may vary from mild to bold. The aroma may even be mildly reminiscent of a particular flower visited by the bees.

Did you know? "There are more than 300 unique types of honey available in the United States, each originating from a different floral source.... As a general rule, the flavor of lighter colored honeys is milder, and the flavor of darker colored honeys is stronger." (from honey.com)

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Clover and Orange Blossom variants are the most common types of honey you'll find on a supermarket shelf. Clover is the most common nectar producing honey plant and is widely used "on the table," whereas Orange Blossom is best for cakes and cookies!

Simple Everyday Granola Bars

½ C butter

¼ C honey

2 C rolled oats + 1 C oats ground*

**I send this cup of oats through a wheat grinder, you can also use a food processor, I'm just basically making an oat flour, this gives it more of a bar consistency, rather than a crumbly, dry oatmeal. If you don't want to take this step, 1C rolled oats ground yields 1 ½ C oat flour (don't have oat flour? you can try using regular wheat flour).*

Melt butter in a small saucepan, add honey and stir to combine. In a separate bowl whisk together oats and ground oats. Add butter/honey mixture and combine until evenly mixed. Press granola firmly into an 8x8 pan, or use a cookie scoop to make fun "granola balls." Bake at 400° for 8-10 minutes.

I've made several variations using this as my base. A favorite among friends is peanut butter granola, where I add: 1/3 C natural peanut butter, 2 T sucanat, and 1/2 tsp. real salt. You can also add a handful of chocolate chips, raisins, dried cranberries, etc. Anything you fancy!

[One friend commented that this recipe had an insane amount of butter... don't worry, you're not going to sit down and eat the whole pan... or are you?! If you're still unsure, I've used ¼C butter and ¼C coconut oil, and it worked just as well, plus I enjoyed the extra health benefits of the coconut oil!]

7. Coconut (Palm) Sugar

Melissa notes in her newest cookbook, "Coconut Sugar is made from coconut palm tree sap. It's not actually made from coconuts as some believe. It's very similar in nutritional content to sucanat with some of the fiber and minerals present."

Coconut sugar has a subtly sweet (similar to brown sugar) flavor, with a slight hint of caramel. However, this sugar is minimally processed, so color, sweetness, and flavor depend strongly on the variety of coconut flower harvested, season it was harvested in, and location.

[Did you know? Coconut sugar has a high mineral content, being a rich source of potassium, magnesium, zinc, and iron.] (from wikipedia.com)

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So, are you ready to start converting your favorite recipes with any of these white sugar alternatives? Remember... even though the alternatives listed above are more *natural* than white table sugar, they should still be consumed in moderation (i.e., Just because it is more *natural*, it doesn't give us license to consume our weight in it, okay?) 😊

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Deborah is a stay-at-home [homeschooling] mom of 3 blessings, and has the exciting privilege of working with Melissa as her graphic and web designer (and loves every minute of it)!

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