



LIFELESS OR LIVELY— IT'S YOUR CHOICE...

In December/January 2005, our article “Why Whole Wheat is Way Better” explained how to get the freshest and most flavorful flour by grinding your own at home. There also are a few companies (listed below) that offer all-natural flours that are almost as good as homemade.

Tod Bramble, grain scientist and an employee-owner of the King Arthur Flour Co. in Norwich, Vt., told us the most important practice that sets companies such as his apart from larger flour manufacturers is what they don't do during the milling process. Most large manufacturers add benzoyl peroxide or chlorine dioxide to chemically whiten (bleach) their flours. Some add potassium bromate to artificially strengthen their flours. Potassium bromate is a suspected carcinogen banned from food products in Europe and Canada. In California, food that contains potassium bromate must bear a warning label.

“It's a mystery to me why anyone wants white-paint colored flour,” Bramble says. Bleach, he says, is basically a holdover from years ago, when it was a status symbol to eat white flour.

“Bleached flour is fairly lifeless flour,” he says. “It's definitely less flavorful. I cannot fathom why anyone would choose treated flour.”

There is a vast difference between whole-wheat flour and white flour, Bramble says. Whole-wheat flour contains the whole berry, which includes the fiber-rich bran and the germ, which is loaded with oils, minerals, vitamins and enzymes, making it a wonderful source of nutrition.

But it will go rancid fast, he says, so whether you mill your own or use pre-packaged flours or mixes, keep whole-wheat products dry and cool to preserve their freshness.

White flour, bleached or unbleached, does not contain the bran or the wheat germ and therefore has a longer shelf life. “It's fairly inert. It has no bran, therefore no fiber,” Bramble says. “Bran is what gives both flavor and nutrition to the flour. When you look at the fiber and carb levels of each, you'll find 1 cup of whole wheat has less carbs than white.”

Bramble says how a certain flour will behave during baking depends on the growing season, the characteristics of the wheat and the milling process.

“We are motivated by the fact that wheat is a natural product that is subject to broad environmental conditions,” he says. “It ends up having different characteristics according to whether it was a wet or dry, or a late growing season.”

Bramble says King Arthur chooses the highest quality hard red winter wheat varieties for its all-purpose flours and hard red spring wheats for its bread flours for their higher protein content.

In the end, for those looking for the freshest, most nutritious and flavorful flours, milling one's own is an economical option. But there are also commercial manufacturers that produce flours and mixes naturally and in small enough batches to provide an alternative to over-milled, over-processed flours. Sources for all-natural or organic flour and bread machine mixes are listed below.