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Healthy recipes that really work

Cereal drama

Rory Ross is bowled over by a healthy new breakfast food

As every food-conscious parent knows, branded breakfast cereals are the work of the devil. Yet the need to whisk the children off to school usually overcomes any qualms about feeding them expensive, sugary, additive-laden, e-riddled and mildly addictive processed effluvium. Usually.

Lucy O'Donnell (pictured below), a Sussex-based mother-of-three, had other ideas. Loathing processed foods, she banned from her table all artificially sweetened cereals and "foods" that contain additives. This didn't sit well with Columbus (nine), Angelica (seven) and Archie (five) who found sugar-free cereals bland and boring.

On holiday in the Alps, O'Donnell stumbled on a granola (toasted cereal mix) that everyone adored. Inspired, she couldn't wait to create her own recipe. Sparing no expense, she mixed hemp seed, linseed, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, pecans, hazelnuts and brazil nuts with honey and oils including pumpkin, sunflower and safflower. She invited friends to choose the best mix of

ingredients. "There was no commercial thought to it," she says. "I just wanted to produce the right granola." Her crunchy oven-baked cereal proved a hit with her children. Friends told her to sell it.

When O'Donnell's normally granola-averse husband started munching handfuls with blueberries, she knew she was on to something. Another fan was the late Mark Birley, founder of Annabel's nightclub, whose driver picked up regular supplies. When O'Donnell entered her granola for the Guild of Fine Food Retailers awards, "the Oscars of the food industry" and won gold, she decided to declare war on e-numbers and go into business.

She named her granola LoveDean, after her local village, sold it to delicatessens and hired an army of Czech au pairs to help. She added cranberries (LoveDean No2) and dates and apples (No3). "I was on a mission," says O'Donnell. Packed in re-sealable mini tubs, her granola makes "the perfect snack for schoolchildren, and fits neatly into a handbag".

Proper home-made granola originated in the US. It's totally natural, packed with good-for-you ingredients and is equally delicious to all ages. "Oats are one of the healthiest things," says O'Donnell. "They are high in cholesterol-melting soluble fibre. My granola is also full of vitamins, minerals, nutrients and Omega 3 oils, but free of e-numbers and preservatives."

While granola looks set to become a cult breakfast cereal, it has yet to trouble Kelloggs. When O'Donnell launched LoveDean she had to call it 'natural toasted cereal.' "No one knew what granola was," she says.

Now it's a very different story. Princess Michael of Kent sprinkles LoveDean on her yogurt every morning. Chrissie Rucker, founder of The White Company and mother of four, says, "The family won't do breakfast without it." Even Tom Aikens, the Michelin-starred chef, eats it.

❖ LoveDean granola is available from Selfridges, Wholefoods, Fortnum & Mason, Waitrose (from August), and also at www.lovedeanfoods.com

