



Non-Kosher Ingredients

Kosher ingredients form the foundation of kosher certification. Because ingredients today are sourced globally, extracted through various methods, and processed in diverse ways, determining whether an ingredient is kosher-compatible requires extensive expertise. To help navigate this complexity, the OU developed a system that classifies ingredients into six numerical groups, ranging from 1 to 6. The lower the number, the less sensitive the ingredient is from a kosher-certification perspective, allowing companies and food-service providers greater flexibility in sourcing.

GROUP 6

Non-kosher ingredients remain common in the food industry. Many animal-derived products continue to play essential roles in manufacturing. Examples include widely used ingredients such as glycerin and gelatin (which will be discussed in future articles), as well as more complex components like certain shortenings and emulsifiers.

Non-kosher animal-based ingredients may originate from inherently non-kosher animals such as pigs. They may also come from species that are kosher by nature—such as cows or sheep—but were not slaughtered according to halachic requirements. It is important to emphasize that even when these

ingredients are technically capable of being produced from kosher-slaughtered animals, such sources are not used in the commercial market. As a result, all animal-based products available commercially—whether derived from kosher species or not—are considered non-kosher.

Another major category of non-kosher ingredients includes grape-derived products. According to halacha, any grape product produced by non-Jews is classified as *stam yeinam*, a rabbinic prohibition applying to wine or grape derivatives handled by non-Jews. Therefore, all liquid grape products—such as wine, grape flavoring, and balsamic vinegar—are considered non-kosher unless they are produced under reliable kosher supervision and sealed accordingly.

GROUP 6 IN PRODUCTION FACILITIES

There are cases in which Group 6 ingredients or products may be present in a facility without compromising the kosher program. In large plants, it is common to maintain completely separated sections—one dedicated to non-kosher production and another fully detached area reserved for kosher production. This setup is found, for example, in certain large fish-processing facilities, where kosher and non-kosher species are handled in different areas. OU supervisors ensure that systems are in place to prevent any possibility of cross-contamination.

It is also worth noting that kosher-for-Passover products may occasionally bear allergen warnings such as “may contain wheat.” This

The OU Israel Gustave & Carol Jacobs Center for Kashrut Education was created to raise awareness and educate the public in all areas of kashrut. Rabbi Ezra Friedman, Deputy Rabbinic Administrator for OU Kosher Israel is the Center's director.



does not compromise their Passover status; it simply reflects the presence of a separate, unrelated production area elsewhere in the facility. The kosher-for-Passover lines are properly kashered and operate under full-time supervision.

THE PREVALENCE OF NON-KOSHER INGREDIENTS

A common misconception is that if a product does not list an overtly non-kosher ingredient—or is not known to contain one—it is safe to consume. In reality, many items contain non-kosher components that are not obvious to consumers.

Examples include:

Kalamata olives in Greece, which are often processed with wine vinegar—even when not listed—because they may be brined in it prior to packaging.

Fish oil: can be derived from non-kosher species and may appear in dairy products or even eggs.

Red food coloring: sometimes sourced from insects; this coloring, known as carmine, often appears on labels as E-120.

Given these complexities, it is crucial for consumers—especially those traveling internationally—to consult knowledgeable halachic authorities or kashrut professionals regarding which products are permissible to purchase. ■

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