

WHOLE



One of the more popular grains is quinoa.

GRAINS | A NEW LOOK AT ANCIENT VARIETIES



Speltz is an ancient grain and has been eaten by people for thousands of years.

The notion that the whole is better than its parts can be applied to grains, which have good nutritional value when they are whole. Visualize an egg, which has parts, such as the yoke and the amniotic sac around it, all of which have nutrients. A whole grain is a seed with parts that contain nutrients, explains Kathy Willowode, community outreach coordinator at the Sunspot Natural Market in West Lafayette.

“That’s what a seed is, it’s like a plant egg, and so when you get the whole seed, you get a complete package: protein, carbohydrates, and you get some fiber, which you wouldn’t get from an egg, but you get fiber, and all of these things have functions to feed us,” she says.

The process of making white flour involves using the remaining part of the seed after the inner part has been taken out. This material is called gluten, Willowode explains, and it makes bread and dough rise. When it’s bleached, it is white flour. ▶▶

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“So white flour is when you take the bran and the germ away, the germ being the seed or baby part of the plant, and you are left with this starchy, somewhat proteinaceous material.”

Generally speaking, people have come to expect the look and feel of white flour in cakes and pastries, because after baking the end result is a taller, fluffier consistency, not to mention the sweet taste when combined with sugar. That is the reason for the light and fluffy consistency of plain white bread, which was a staple in American households until the last 20 years.

“White flour makes lovely cakes, very tender, very white, and we like our pastries to be sweet also, so there are reasons for white flour,” Willowoode says. However, the food value is not there the way it is with whole grains because it is just a part of the original plant, that has then been altered.

If you are interested in making your holiday cakes and cookies a little healthier this holiday season but want to maintain a light texture, consider the following technique: Use half whole wheat flour and half white flour in the recipe. Cheri Vaughn, pastry chef at the Purdue Memorial Union, says that you can take any baking recipe and substitute half and half for the flour portion of the recipe.

“We use a hoagie (a sub roll) that is half and half at the union, and also we have a pancake recipe that uses half white and half wheat flour to make a lighter pancake. Most people will not notice the difference, except that it does produce a lighter consistency,” she says. Diners can go to the Urban Market at the Union—located in the food court in the basement—to sample more products that are made with whole grain, she says.

When you see the word “enriched” on food labels, it usually means that after the inner part of the seed – the whole grain material – is taken out there are nutrients added back that were lost in making the white flour. The fiber, however, is not added back; it is lost, explains Vaughn.

Willowoode says that is one reason she likes to buy organic products. “More and more I am buying items at the Sunspot, and I am going with organic because I don’t want to have the pesticides, and I don’t want genetically modified ingredients,” she says.

Willowoode asks a good question: Why even make white flour if it has no real nutritional value? One of the answers is that white flour has a longer shelf life than whole grain products. The reason is that the inner part of the plant, the part that contains the bran and germ, also has oils, and the oils “go rancid pretty fast,” Willowoode says. White flour, which has the oil and fiber removed, keeps much better.

Whole grains are tasty and nutritious in recipes other than baked goods. Whole grains make great additions to salads and soups. Try quinoa (pronounced keen-wa) or amaranth, notes Willowoode. Quinoa has become a popular choice for health-conscious consumers in recent years and can be used similarly to rice in many recipes.

“It doesn’t really look like rice, but it behaves a lot like rice, the way that you would use it in cooking,” she says. Quinoa can be eaten cold or hot. Willowoode suggests using quinoa in a porridge-type of dish for breakfast, much the way you would prepare oatmeal.

Cooks who want to grind their own grain can buy them in bulk at the Sunspot, and then combine several different grains for more nutrition and taste, such as barley and several varieties of rice.

The Sunspot also sells “ancient grains” such as spelt and kamut, which are types of wheat, explains Willowoode. They are called ancient grains because people have been eating them for thousands of years, and were no doubt an important part of the diets of our hunter-gatherer ancestors.

RECIPES

Chicken and Rice Soup with Kale

“Here’s a soup I put together. It is really delicious and is even better on the second and third days.”

Kathy Willowoode, community outreach coordinator, Sunspot Natural Market

- ¾ lb. skinless, boneless chicken thighs, cut into 1-inch chunks
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 10 cups chicken broth
- ½ cup brown rice
- 12 leaves of kale, centers removed and chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste

Over medium heat in a skillet, sauté chicken, onions, and garlic in olive oil, until onions are translucent. Put the mixture in a cooking pot, and add the chicken broth and brown rice. Bring everything to a boil, and reduce the heat to a simmer. Cook for 30 to 40 minutes or until the rice is tender. Add the kale and cover the pot. Cook for about 10 minutes. Serves 8.

Today, there are many ancient grains to try, but the grain is still the same.

“Add some vegetables, some oil, and a little meat, and you have all the basics,” she says.

Whole grains can also be obtained and eaten in the form of cereals and snacks, and snacks—like it or not—are a constant in most people’s daily diets, so we should try our best to make them healthy. At ALDI stores in Lafayette and West Lafayette, consumers can purchase a long list of whole grain cereals and snacks. Some of the more tempting-sounding whole grain products on the list include Granola Cereal Assortment, multi-grain crisps, Crunchy Cinnamon Squares and Fruit Rounds.

ALDI is a partner of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and features the MyPlate icon on its website. MyPlate is a program by the USDA that replaced the familiar food pyramid, and serves as a visual reminder to make healthy choices when shopping. You can spot the MyPlate graphic with its bright colors (www.choosemyplate.gov).

“Our efforts to help promote the new nutritional guidelines for Americans through our partnership with the USDA’s MyPlate program were recognized in the 2012 *Supermarket News* ‘Fit List,’ which celebrates industry-leading initiatives around health, wellness, and sustainability,” says Laura Bauer, Greenwood division vice president for ALDI.

Today many snack and cereal boxes will feature prominently the nutritional portion of whole grains in the product, so that is something to look for when grocery shopping.

At the very least, try Vaughn’s half and half suggestion for recipes, but also try to make sure at least half of the carbohydrate products you buy during a given week contain whole grains. Then you’re on the way to improving your family’s eating habits, and you might find some surprisingly good tasting foods, too. ☘

MAKE THE HOLIDAYS HEALTHFUL AS WELL AS JOYFUL...

Pumpkin Streusel Squares

"The Pumpkin Squares and Protein Pancakes are popular at the Purdue Union."

Cheri Vaughn, pastry chef, Purdue Memorial Union

- 1 ¾ cups whole wheat flour
- ⅓ cup packed brown sugar
- ⅓ cup cold margarine or butter cut into small pieces
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 1 16-ounce can of pumpkin (2 cups)
- 1 14-ounce can of sweetened, condensed milk
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon allspice
- ½ teaspoon salt (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. In a medium mixing bowl, combine the whole wheat flour and the brown sugar. Stir in the margarine or butter, until the mixture has a crumbly consistency. Mix in the pecans. From this mixture, measure one cup, and set it aside.

In a 12x17-inch baking dish, use this crumb mixture as the crust, and press it firmly on the bottom and halfway up the sides of the pan. Thoroughly mix the remaining ingredients in a large bowl, and pour the mixture over the crust. Sprinkle the reserved crumb mixture on the top. Bake until golden brown, 45 to 55 minutes. Cool. Serves 8 to 10.

Vaughn suggests serving the squares with ice cream or whipped cream, if you would like. Store in the refrigerator.

Protein Pancakes

- ½ cup ricotta cheese
- ⅓ cup packed brown sugar
- 2 egg whites
- 2 Tablespoons canola oil
- 1 cup low-fat milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 cup whole wheat flour

Beat together the ricotta cheese, brown sugar, egg whites and oil in a medium bowl. Add the milk and vanilla, then the baking powder, soda and cinnamon, and beat. Stir in the whole wheat flour, but do not overmix.

Heat a griddle, and for each pancake, pour about ¼ cup of the batter onto the heated griddle. Turn the pancakes when the edges look cooked, bubbles form on the top and they look golden.

They are good plain, notes Vaughn, but she suggests serving them with maple syrup, applesauce with cinnamon, with yogurt or fruit.



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