

The Gains in Grains

Whole grain sources of carbohydrates improve health in myriad ways, despite what devotees to low-carb lifestyles may think. Grains provide a healthy dose of fiber, protein, vitamins and antioxidants, as well as carbohydrates, the body's primary fuel supply. The key is choosing whole grains over refined. Diets rich in whole grains can improve digestive health and reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease. However, refined grains are stripped of fiber and more than half of their vitamins and minerals. Fortunately, there's an abundance of whole grain options to choose from if you're bored with brown rice.

FARRO is an ancient strain of hard wheat with a satisfying chewy texture and a roasted, nutty flavor. Wildly popular in Italian and Mediterranean cooking, this grain is available whole, pearled or semi-pearled (meaning some of the bran layer has been removed). Whole farro needs to be soaked before cooking, usually overnight, while pearled and semi-pearled varieties cook fast without soaking. Farro makes a delicious pasta-like salad, a hearty add-in to soups and stews, and an excellent substitute for rice when making risotto.

AMARANTH is a mildly nutty, highly nutritious grain embraced in Mexican and Peruvian cultures. The tiny, pale-golden seeds are gluten-free and rich in protein, calcium, iron and fiber, making amaranth a staple in vegetarian cooking and a good choice for those who have celiac disease. Amaranth absorbs flavor from added ingredients and yields to an array of cooking applications, such as roasting, popping or boiling. It can be ground into flour and used in baked goods, popped and seasoned like popcorn or make a satisfying hot breakfast.

Like amaranth, **QUINOA** is exceptionally nutrient dense, gluten-free and easily adaptable to flavors. In fact, quinoa has

the highest potassium and protein content of any grain. It's considered a complete protein and provides all the essential amino acids the body requires. White quinoa has a fluffy texture that delicately pops on the palate, while red and black varieties are crunchier. It cooks quickly in just 10 to 15 minutes and tastes delicious on its own, perhaps with a squeeze of lemon, sprinkle of Parmesan and splash of olive oil. It's become a popular substitute for starchy pasta and rice.

WHEAT BERRIES are whole kernels of wheat that produce whole wheat flour once the grains are processed. Loaded with fiber, they take a bit more time to cook than other grains, resulting in a sweet, nutty taste and chewy texture similar to farro. If you bake bread at home, try adding cooked wheat berries to the next batch for a hearty crunch. Wheat berries can star as a substantial vegetarian meal and, like other grains, is delicious when added to salads and soups.

BARLEY has a pasta-like consistency and is available in many forms, including pearled, hulled and quick-cooking. Or try barley flour, flakes or grits. Pearled and quick-cook varieties are less chewy, but lower in nutrients than hulled barley because some of the grain's bran layer is removed. Barley is most favored for soups, but can be used like any other grain, perhaps in a pilaf or as a substitute for rice in a stir-fry.

BULGUR, a staple in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cooking, is made when whole-grain hard wheat has been parboiled, then dried and cracked into smaller bits. It's most commonly used in tabbouleh, a salad of finely chopped parsley, mint, tomatoes and cucumber, seasoned with olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Bulgur cooks quickly, has a mild nutty flavor and a tender but chewy texture. It's a great filler when making meatballs or meatloaf and can be used like rice or any other grain.

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