

Great Grains

These ancient superfoods from all corners of the world are worth rediscovering.



WE ALL KNOW that whole grains do a body good. Of course, we also know that brown rice gets a little ho-hum. But your diet doesn't have to be that way. To enliven your breakfast, soups, and side dishes, look no further than the ethnic aisle of your grocery store, where you'll find a rainbow of intriguing, exotic grains and seeds. They're some of the oldest foods on Earth—and they're gastronomic treasures, full of nutrients and flavor. Add these four to your shopping cart. —**LESLIE GOLDMAN**



FREEKEH

Crunchy roasted wheat kernels with a smoky flavor

Origin: Middle East

WHY IT'S HEALTHY

Because the kernels are harvested while they're still young, they contain more vitamins and minerals than other grains. Freekeh also provides up to four times the fiber content of brown rice, which is good news for the waistline: A 2010 study found that fiber protects against weight gain. In the stomach, freekeh acts as a prebiotic—providing sustenance for the good bacteria that aid in digestion.

WHIP IT UP

Bring 5 cups cold water and 2 cups freekeh to a boil. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer 35 to 40 minutes. Chef Bradford Heap of Boulder's SALT recommends sprinkling the grain into soups and salads or mixing it with roasted squash, sage, extra-virgin olive oil, and champagne vinegar.

Buy it online:
freekehlicious.com.



FARRO

Chewy, wheat-like grains that taste similar to barley

Origin: Egypt

WHY IT'S HEALTHY

In addition to vitamins B and E, farro is rich in magnesium—which Los Angeles-based dietitian Ashley Koff calls nature's muscle relaxant. She recommends adding farro to your diet to relieve tension and cramps.

WHIP IT UP

Soak the grains overnight, and drain. Combine 2 cups water with 1 cup farro and bring to a boil; then reduce heat, cover, and simmer 25 to 35 minutes. For 6 to 8 servings of a hearty vegetarian dish, chef Heap mixes 2 cups cooked farro with ½ pound sautéed shiitake mushrooms, ¼ cup cream, and ¼ cup Parmigiano-Reggiano, then simmers until thick, adding salt to taste.

Buy it online:
ansonmills.com



AMARANTH

Sold as seeds, flour, and puffed cereal—all with a nutty, toasted flavor

Origin: Central America

WHY IT'S HEALTHY

One cup of cooked amaranth has nearly as much calcium as a cup of low-fat cottage cheese, an impressive 5.2 grams of fiber (many cold cereals have about 1 gram per serving), and more protein than a hard-boiled egg. Unlike most other grains, it contains lysine, an amino acid that the body needs for growth and tissue repair. Amaranth is also gluten-free.

WHIP IT UP

Bring 3 cups water or broth and 1 cup seeds to a boil; cover and simmer 20 to 25 minutes, stirring occasionally. Cooked amaranth has an oatmeal-like consistency. Enjoy as a hot cereal, or use it to stuff mushrooms or tomatoes. When baking, replace up to ¼ of the white flour with amaranth flour.

Buy it online:
bobsredmill.com



CHIA

Small black or white seeds (which you may recognize from "Ch-ch-ch-chia!" Pet ads) that have an unassuming flavor

Origin: Mexico

WHY IT'S HEALTHY

Chia is one of the richest plant sources of omega-3 fatty acids, and 1 tablespoon of seeds packs 3 grams of fiber—as much as many fiber supplements. The seeds absorb several times their volume in water, which promotes a feeling of fullness. In fact, a 2008 University of Toronto study found regular consumption of white chia seeds slashed hunger by up to 63 percent.

WHIP IT UP

Add moisture and nutrient value to breads and muffins by adding a few tablespoons to your recipes. Also try sprinkling raw seeds on your oatmeal or layering them into a yogurt parfait.

Buy it online:
navitasnaturals.com