

### March 23: Grain Berries

Wheat is a grass whose edible grains are one-seeded dry fruits that don't open. The wheat genus (group) offers many whole grains, sometimes called berries, when in the form of whole, unprocessed kernels. Varieties include einkorn, spelt, wheat berries, kamut, emmer (farro), and triticale (hybrid of wheat and rye). Grain berries are a good substitute for rice in recipes and add texture to salads, baked goods such as bread and muffins, soups, chilis or stews. It's typically best to pre-cook whole grains since they can take more than 45 minutes to cook. Similar to other dry grains, 1 cup dry typically yields 2 cups cooked.

There are four main cooking methods for grain berries-

*Pasta method:* add grains to boiling water or stock and cook until tender before draining

*Rice method:* cover grains with water or stock, following package directions, and bring to boil. Cover pot, reduce heat and simmer until liquid is absorbed and grains are tender.

*Pilaf:* Briefly toast dry grains or sauté with olive oil. Add flavors like onion and garlic and follow the rice method above.

*Pressure Cooker/multicooker:* follow instructions of specific device

To decrease cooking time, some grain berries are processed through a pearling machine to remove all or part of the bran. Pearled or semi-pearled grains are no longer whole grains and result in softer, sometimes soggy cooked texture due to increased moisture absorption. Additionally, this process removes minerals, vitamins, and flavorful qualities from the grains. Look at cooking times on grain berry packaging to identify whether they've undergone pearling. Cooking times 45-75 minutes indicate whole grains or not pearled, fewer than 30 minutes suggests semi-pearled and 15 minutes or fewer indicate fully pearled grains.

Every part of a whole grain offers B vitamins and minerals; the bran provides fiber, lignans and flavorful phytonutrients; the healthy fat-infused germ contributes vitamin E and antioxidants; and the bulky, starchy endosperm provides protein and other nutrients. The fat content in grain berries makes them vulnerable to rancidity when exposed to heat, air or light. Store uncooked whole grains in a cool, dry place in an airtight container for up to six months or freeze for up to a year.