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## **Six ancient grains to spice up your summer salads**

By now you've probably caught up that quinoa is pronounced 'keen-wah' instead of 'quin-oh-a', but it's not the only ancient ingredient you're likely to see as a regular addition to Australian tables this summer.

Other pseudo-grain friends amaranth and buckwheat, plus grains freekeh, farro and millet, are also making an entrance, according to the Grains and Legumes Nutrition Council™ (GLNC).

As well adding new flavours to your table, pseudo-grains and ancient grains add a new dimension to a dish – a story. Whether worshipped by ancient Aztecs in South America or a staple for the all-conquering Roman legions in Europe, these grains have travelled through time to reach your plate.

With the increasing variety of ancient grains available in supermarkets and specialty food stores, what better time to incorporate these nutrient powerhouses into your diet than in summer salads, with BBQ and entertaining season just around the corner?

GLNC – the authority on the nutrition and health benefits of grains and legumes – and nutritionist Catherine Saxelby offer the latest on ancient grains and how to use them.

### **How's a pseudo-grain different to a grain?**

Pseudo-grains are from a different family of plants to true grains like wheat, oats, rice, barley and rye. While pseudo-grains differ in origin, they are often referred to as grains as they are nutritionally similar to grains and are cooked and eaten in much the same way.

### **Why do I need them in my diet?**

As well as adding variety to your meal, pseudo-grains and ancient grains are also bursting with essential nutrients for health and wellbeing. Just like more traditional grains – oats, wheat, rye, barley, brown rice – pseudo-grains and ancient grains contain all of the essential parts of a whole grain which are rich nutrients and contain health protective phytonutrients.

## **6 ancient grains to spice up summer salads**

### **1. Quinoa**

Worshipped by the ancient Aztecs, the protein power of quinoa is impressive – not only is quinoa higher than most grains in protein, it is one of the few plant foods which is a complete protein, meaning it contains significant amounts of all of the essential amino acids. In addition, quinoa is gluten free, has a low Glycemic Index (GI), high in fibre and is a source of magnesium, which plays a key role in your body's energy production.

**TIP:** While beige quinoa is most commonly available you can also find red, purple and black quinoa. To make perfectly cooked quinoa every time try this:

1. Add 1 cup of quinoa to 3 cups of water, bring to a boil then simmer for 12 – 15 minutes. Drain and rinse with lukewarm water.
2. Spread the cooked quinoa out on a tray, drizzle with some olive oil and dry off in the oven at 160°C for 10 minutes until slightly golden, light and fluffy.

## **2. Amaranth**

A close cousin of quinoa, amaranth is a small round grain that packs a nutritional punch. Amaranth is high in protein, fibre, is gluten free and is also higher in healthy oils than other grains.

Unlike other grains, when cooked amaranth never completely softens – this means amaranth is suited to making healthy breakfasts, porridges, and soups, or you can buy (or make) popped amaranth to mix into baked snacks, mueslis or granola.

**TIP:** To cook amaranth, simply add 2½-3 cups of water to 1 cup of dry grain and boil for 20-25 minutes.

## **3. Buckwheat**

Buckwheat has a unique triangular shape and despite its name, it is not related to wheat. Nutritionally similar to quinoa it contains significant amounts of all of the essential amino acids, has a low GI, high in fibre, is gluten free and is particularly high in niacin, which helps release energy from food.

With an earthy flavour, buckwheat is versatile in the kitchen – it's great as a side dish, in salads or in baking, and is commonly used to make pancakes. Toasting buckwheat improves the taste and shortens cooking time.

**TIP:** To cook buckwheat, add 1¾-2 cups of water to 1 cup of buckwheat and simmer for 12 – 15 minutes.

## **4. Freekeh**

Freekeh is the name given to any grain which is harvested while green (or immature) and then roasted. Freekeh has a low GI and because the grains are harvested green, they retain higher amounts of protein, vitamins, and minerals. The freekeh available today is made from roasted green wheat but in the near future other varieties of freekeh may be available made from other grains including green barley and triticale.

Freekeh is easy to prepare and can be used in salads, as a side dish or in pilafs.

**TIP:** To prepare, use 1 cup of grain to 2½ cups of water. As a guide, cook for 15 minutes for cracked freekeh and 40 minutes for whole Freekeh. Drain.

## **5. Emmer (Farro)**

Farro is the Italian name for emmer which is an ancient variety of wheat. It was one of the first grains ever domesticated by humans. Ancient varieties of wheat are nutritionally similar to modern day wheats, however are generally higher in protein and fibre, particularly insoluble fibre which is important for digestive wellbeing.

Emmer is versatile and is ideal for use in salads, soups, baking or as a side dish i.e. pilaf. Emmer and other ancient wheats must have their outer husk removed to be eaten so you will find these in the health food aisle, online or at specialty stores sold without their husk (pearled) or cracked.

**TIP:** To cook add 2 cups of water to 1 cup of emmer and simmer for 20-30 minutes. Drain.

## **6. Millet**

Before rice was widely eaten in Asia, it is thought that different varieties of millet were the staple grain. Millet is almost always consumed as a whole grain and so delivers protein, fibre and B group vitamins.

Millet has a mild flavour which pairs well with many foods and can be prepared to produce a fluffy side dish similar to couscous or a creamy like porridge.

**TIP:** To cook add 2-2½ cups of water to 1 cup of millet and simmer for 20-30 minutes. Toasting millet before cooking helps to bring out the full flavour.

### **Where to buy them**

Ancient grains and pseudo-grains are becoming more available as more and more people realise their nutritional and culinary potential. You can now find these grains in your local supermarket as well as in specialty stores or online.

You may have also spotted these ancient grains popping up in different grain foods like breakfast cereals, breads, crispbreads and readymade meals / side dishes. So next time you're out shopping keep an eye out. Don't forget that traditional whole grain and high fibre grain foods are always a healthy choice too – and generally cheaper.

For more information and recipes on ancient grains check out Catherine Saxelby's new book *Ancient Grains - Whole Food Recipes for the Modern Table*. For more information on the nutrition and health benefits of grain foods visit the Grains & Legumes Nutrition Council™ [www.glnc.org.au](http://www.glnc.org.au).

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## **ENDS**

### **For more information:**

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