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Modern cooking with an ancient grain

Quinoa (pronounced keen-wah) has really gained popularity in the past few years. Originally only found in health food stores, it is now very easy to find this pseudo-grain (it is technically a seed) at your local supermarket.

Quinoa is easy to prepare – simply rinse the quinoa to remove its bitter outer coating, then simmer in two parts water to one part quinoa until all the liquid is absorbed. Fluff with a fork before serving. Because this is the same proportion of water-to-grain that is used to make rice, many people prepare quinoa in their rice cooker. If you're looking for some extra guidance on how to cook quinoa, before you make a recipe, we've posted a video tutorial at youtube.com/TheBlueFlameKitchen.

Quinoa is a staple food for the Andean peoples in South America. Here, most people eat it as a healthy alternative to rice and other grains at the dinner table, but it also does well served cold in salads. Our Curried Quinoa and Lentil Salad combines quinoa with lentils in an aromatic salad that is a protein and fibre powerhouse, making it a hearty and filling side dish.

Our Greek Quinoa Salad combines the familiar elements of a traditional Greek salad – cucumber, bell peppers, tomatoes, onion and feta cheese – with quinoa, spinach and chickpeas, making it a delicious and healthy twist on a classic.

CURRIED QUINOA AND LENTIL SALAD

3 1/4 cups (800 mL) water
2 tsp (10 mL) curry powder
1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt
1 cup (250 mL) quinoa, thoroughly rinsed and drained
1/2 cup (125 mL) dried red lentils, rinsed and drained
1/4 cup (50 mL) white wine vinegar
2 tbsp (25 mL) tomato paste
2 tbsp (25 mL) water
2 tsp (10 mL) curry powder
1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt
1/8 tsp (0.5 mL) cayenne pepper
2 tbsp (25 mL) oil
1/4 cup (50 mL) thinly sliced green onion

4 cups (1 L) torn young Swiss chard leaves or baby spinach

Combine 3 1/4 cups (800 mL) water, 2 tsp (10 mL) curry powder and 1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium heat. Stir in quinoa and lentils; return to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Remove from heat and let stand for 15 minutes. Transfer quinoa mixture to a bowl and fluff with a fork. Cool to room temperature. Meanwhile, to prepare dressing, whisk together next 6 ingredients (vinegar through cayenne pepper) until combined. Gradually whisk in oil until blended. Stir in green onion. Add dressing and Swiss chard to quinoa mixture and toss to combine. Serve immediately. Serves 6.

Cook's Note: The outer hull of quinoa contains a bitter resin called saponin. Quinoa must be rinsed thoroughly before cooking in order to remove this bitter coating.

GREEK QUINOA SALAD

1 1/4 cups water
1 cup quinoa, thoroughly rinsed and drained
1/2 cup chopped fresh basil
1/3 cup white wine vinegar
1/4 cup chopped fresh oregano
1 tsp freshly ground pepper
1/4 tsp salt
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
4 cups chopped fresh spinach
1 can (19 oz/540 mL) chickpeas, rinsed and drained
2 cups cubed feta cheese
1 1/4 cups chopped English cucumber
1 cup chopped yellow bell pepper
1 cup halved grape tomatoes
1/3 cup chopped red onion

1. Place water in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil. Stir in quinoa and return to a boil.
2. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, until liquid is absorbed and quinoa is tender, about 14 - 15 minutes. Remove from heat.
3. Fluff quinoa with a fork and cool to room temperature.
4. Meanwhile, to prepare dressing, stir together basil, vinegar, oregano, pepper and salt until combined. Gradually whisk in oil until blended.
5. Combine quinoa, spinach, chickpeas, feta, cucumber, yellow pepper, tomatoes and red onion in a bowl.
6. Add dressing and toss to combine. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 8 hours.



7. Stir before serving. Serves 12.

Nutritional analysis per serving:

229 calories, 12.9 g fat, 8.6 g protein, 20.6 g carbohydrate, 3.8 g fibre, 383 mg sodium