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Ancient grains with a modern taste twist

Many people are rediscovering ancient grains like amaranth, buckwheat and spelt as alternatives to the wheat and corn that is so abundant in our food supply today. But what exactly is spelt, and how do you cook with it?

Spelt is an ancient grain that is related to wheat. Whole spelt can be found at health food stores or bulk stores. If you are unable to find it, try replacing with wheat berries, farro or barley. For a gluten-free alternative, try buckwheat, which is also sold as kasha.

Our Asian Spelt Salad combines whole spelt with fresh garden vegetables in a light, Japanese-inspired dressing, while our Spelt and Baby Kale Salad is an aromatic green salad of kale, mint and parsley, sprinkled with sunflower seeds and whole spelt for texture.

If you're looking for some extra guidance on how to soak and cook spelt, before you make a recipe, we're posted a video tutorial at youtube.com/TheBlueFlameKitchen.

ASIAN SPELT SALAD

1 cup spelt
5 cups water, divided
1 cup green beans, trimmed
1/4 cup soy sauce
3 tbsp mirin (rice wine) or liquid honey
3 tbsp rice vinegar
1 tbsp fresh lime juice
1 tsp finely chopped fresh ginger
1/2 tsp sesame oil
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
1/3 cup grapeseed oil or canola oil
3/4 cup quartered grape tomatoes
1/2 cup diced carrot
1/2 cup diced seeded English cucumber
1/2 cup sliced green onions

1. Combine spelt and 2 1/2 cups water in a bowl. Cover and refrigerate for 8 hours.
2. Drain spelt. Combine spelt and remaining 2 1/2 cups water in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil.

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3. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, until spelt is tender but still slightly chewy, about 55 - 60 minutes. Drain and cool.
4. Meanwhile, cook beans in boiling salted water until tender, about 3 minutes; drain.
5. Cool beans immediately in ice water; drain. Diagonally slice beans into 1 inch pieces; set aside.
6. To prepare dressing, whisk together soy sauce, mirin, vinegar, lime juice, ginger, sesame oil and garlic until combined. Gradually whisk in grapeseed oil until blended.
7. Combine spelt, beans, tomatoes, carrot, cucumber and green onions in a bowl.
8. Add dressing and toss to combine. Let stand for 15 minutes.
9. Stir before serving. Serves 6.

Nutritional analysis per serving:

227 calories, 13.3 g fat, 5.6 g protein, 23.6 g carbohydrate, 6.6 g fibre, 55 mg sodium

SPELT AND BABY KALE SALAD

- 1 2/3 cups spelt
- 8 cups water
- 3 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp liquid honey
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh thyme or 1 tsp dried thyme, crumbled
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 pkg (5 oz/142 g) baby kale, chopped
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh mint
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 1/2 cup dried cherries
- 1/2 cup sunflower seeds, toasted
- 1/4 cup chopped shallots

1. Combine spelt and water in a Dutch oven. Bring to a boil.
2. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, until spelt is tender but still slightly chewy, about 55 minutes; drain and cool completely.
3. To prepare dressing, whisk together vinegar, mustard, honey, thyme and salt until combined. Gradually whisk in oil until blended.
4. Combine spelt, kale, mint, parsley, cheese, cherries, sunflower seeds and shallots in a bowl.
5. Add dressing and toss to combine. Serves 8.



Cook's Note: Spelt is an ancient grain with a chewy texture and nutty flavour. Look for it in natural food stores or specialty food stores.

Baby kale is more tender and mild in flavour than mature kale. It is often used as a salad green. Look for it in the produce section of grocery stores where packaged greens are sold.

Nutritional analysis per serving:

318 calories, 16 g fat, 9.7 g protein, 39.4 g carbohydrate, 9 g fibre, 243 mg sodium