

FEATURED INGREDIENT: WHOLE GRAINS

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Whole grains have been a part of diets across the world for approximately 3000 - 4000 years. They are a versatile pantry staple that can be used in everything from breakfast dishes to desserts.

What makes a whole grain?

According to the [Whole Grain Council](#) -

"A grain is considered to be a whole grain as long as all three original parts – the bran, germ, and endosperm – are still present in the same proportions as when the grain was growing in the fields."

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Nutrition professionals recommend including whole grains as part of a well-balanced diet. "Whole" grains, rather than "refined" grains, are considered a beneficial carbohydrate providing antioxidants, fiber, B vitamins and minerals which can actually lower the risk of many serious diseases. Keep in mind, as with any food or nutrition advice, one size does not fit all. Some bodies do react negatively when grains are consumed, particularly grains that contain gluten. If that is the case, it is critical to avoid them. Many gluten-free whole grain options exist, however, such as brown rice, quinoa, millet, wild rice, amaranth, and oats, that may work well depending on dietary needs.

BUY AND STORE

A large variety of whole grains are available at grocery stores, co-ops, specialty food stores and online making them easily available.

- Buying grains in bulk generally saves money. It is best to purchase from retailers that have good turn over to get the freshest grains.
- If buying prepackaged whole grains, check the "sell by" date.
- Fresh grains may have no aroma or smell slightly sweet; do not purchase if they smell oily, musty or sour.
- Choose containers that provide an air-tight seal to keep out moisture and air, such as glass, plastic or zip-lock. This prolongs the shelf life of the grain.
- Label the container with the name and purchase date. It is also helpful to include general cooking instructions.
- Store whole grains in a cool, dry, dark place like a pantry or other storage area off the floor. Grains can be stored in the refrigerator or freezer.
- Whole grains generally last up to 6 months in a pantry, or up to a year if frozen.

For information on shelf life of specific grains, check out this handy chart on the Whole Grain Council website - [Storing Whole Grains](#).

USE

- Serve as a side dish, in a salad, soups and stews, in an appetizer, quick breads and yeast breads, desserts, as part of an entrée, or in a breakfast dish.
- Use whole grains interchangeably - instead of brown rice, try farro, bulgur, wild rice or barley.

COOK

Two common stove top methods for preparing whole grains are called pilaf or absorption method and the pasta method.

- The pilaf or absorption method involves lightly toasting the grains in the sauce pan before adding the cooking liquid, then covering and simmering them until the liquid is absorbed and the grains are tender.
- The pasta method also simmers the whole grains in a sauce pan covered by water or broth, but any liquid remaining at the end of the cooking time is drained off, just like when cooking pasta.
- Aromatics can be added to the cooking pots to build flavor, such as fresh or dried herbs, spices or onions, garlic, and other vegetables.
- Water is commonly used to cook whole grains, but consider using broth, stock, plant-based milk (up to half water, half milk), or other liquid for varying the flavor of the grain.

Whole grains can also be prepared in rice cookers and multi-cookers, such as Instant Pot or Zavor. See your particular model for cooking instructions.

Cooking times vary by grain. For more in-depth information on cooking whole grains, check out these handy guides from the Whole Grain Council -

- [Whole Grain Cooking Tips](#) - The Whole Grain Council
- [Cooking and Eating Gluten-Free Whole Grains](#) - The Whole Grain Council

FUN FACT

[Bob's Red Mill](#), my favorite whole grain source, takes great care in producing high quality whole grains. They offer the largest line of organic whole grain foods in the United States with over 40 varieties of packaged individual and blended whole grains including - quinoa, freekeh, farro, oats, amaranth, wild rice, millet, bulgur, spelt, and rice just to name a few!