

# *Alternatives to Wheat*

Vegetarian diets rely heavily on grains and legumes (dried peas, lentils and beans). In recent years, many consumers have moved away from grains. That's not necessarily a bad thing when it comes to refined white carbohydrates such as pasta, bread and rice. However, whole grains do provide many nutritional benefits and are important for a healthy, balanced diet.

Most of us are familiar with common grains such as rice, corn, barley, oats and wheat, as well as products made from these (pasta, couscous, and bulgur). Other grains are still relatively new to many people.

Wheat is one of the most over-consumed foods in our diets. It is used in everything from breads to soy sauce. When processed, this grain is stripped of important nutrients. It also has high gluten content, which is the glue that holds bread mixes together. It is the gluten that often prevents absorption of nutrients by the intestines.

Many other common grains, including oats, rye, corn, barley, millet and rice, are related to wheat. Kamut and spelt are also varieties of wheat. The following grain-like plant products have a high nutritional value and are some of the best sources of protein in the vegetable kingdom.

*This and the information following, has been adapted from the 'Thirteen Moons: seasonal recipes to nourish and inspire' cookbook by Louise Racine. Pages 12-15 ISBN 0978113309*

[www.thirteenmoons.ca](http://www.thirteenmoons.ca)



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**Amaranth** comes from a broad-leaf plant and is high in calcium, folic acid, magnesium and iron as well as the amino acid lysine (great for preventing and healing cold-sores!) Whole amaranth seeds, when simmered, develop a thick, oatmeal-like gelatinous consistency, making amaranth an excellent thickener for soups and stews. You can also cook it with another grain (or grains) such as brown rice or buckwheat. Try it as an alternative to rice or as a cooked breakfast dish or dessert.



**Buckwheat** is the fruit of a leafy plant and isn't related to wheat. It is high in B vitamins, iron, fibre, potassium, calcium, and lysine. Buckwheat has a distinct, nut-like flavour. Serve it as a side dish or porridge, or as a great alternative to rice. Since the flavour is intense, it can be combined with rice, Quinoa, or vegetables. Kasha is the roasted, hulled kernel, cracked into granules.



**Kamut** (pronounced "ka-moot") is also available in the form of kernels, flour and flakes (although difficult to find in NZ). It has more protein than regular wheat, as well as B vitamins, iron and magnesium. Kamut is used to make pasta and breads.



**Millet** is an excellent source of calcium and protein, contains magnesium and potassium, and has more iron than any other cereal. Millet is a sweet-tasting grain, suitable for breakfast or for making desserts, but is also great as a part of main dishes. It is a multi-season grain, which means it is good to eat both summer and winter. For optimal nutrition, serve millet with legumes.



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**Quinoa** (pronounced "keen-wa") is related to leafy vegetables such as silver-beet and spinach, although you won't find it in the produce section. It is high in iron, potassium, riboflavin, magnesium, zinc, copper, magnesium and folic acid. Quinoa is quick and easy to prepare and cooks to a light and fluffy, un-sticky texture, increasing three to four times in volume. You can serve it like a rice side dish, in soups, salads, stuffing's, main dishes such as stews, pilaffs, casseroles, or stuffed peppers, and as a nutritional breakfast cereal.



**Spelt** is available as a kernel, ground into flour – light and whole varieties – and flakes that you can use for baking or as a breakfast cereal. Spelt is high in complex carbohydrates, B vitamins and iron. It is easy now to find baked products made with spelt, and can be used as a substitute for wheat in most recipes.



**Teff** is the smallest grain in the world, but it supplies more fibre-rich bran and nutritious germ than any other grain! It has seventeen times the calcium of whole wheat or barley. Teff has a nutty flavour and makes an excellent breakfast cereal. It can also be added to soups and stews. Teff flour is used to make tasty quick breads and pancakes.



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## Storing Grains

Grains will last indefinitely if stored under the right conditions. Keep them in tightly sealed glass jars, in a cool, dry place. The germ of many whole grains contains a small amount of oil that may turn rancid. Grains with a high oil content, such as Quinoa, should be kept in your refrigerator or freezer.

## Cooking Grains

Whole grains, such as brown rice, can be soaked for 12 hours or overnight before cooking them. Doing so will yield 50% more nutrients, and the phytic acid will break down, producing a more digestible, sweeter tasting and fluffier product. Soaking will also reduce cooking time.

Most grains don't need to be rinsed. Quinoa is the exception — rinse well in a fine sieve before using. If you have time, brown your grains in a pot over a low heat for about 5 minutes before adding liquid to give them a roasted flavour.

Add water and bring to a rapid boil, add salt if desired, reduce heat and simmer, covered and undisturbed, for the time indicated in the chart on the right.

Grain (1 cup)	Water (cups)	Time in Minutes
Amaranth	2½ - 3	20-25
Buckwheat	2	15-20
Kamut Flakes	2	5
Millet	2	35-40
Quinoa	2	15-20
Rice—Brown	2	45-50
Rice—Wild	3½	55-60
Spelt Flakes	2	3
Teff	4	15-20

Remove the pot from the heat and let the grain stand, covered, for 10 minutes.



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