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TEFF COOKIES!

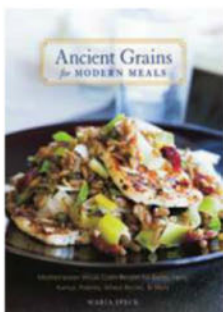
Once staples of ancient societies, heirloom grains have become the foundation of a food trend—and not just in the crunchy, hippie, healthy culinary circles. The new grain is from the Old World.

Ever hear of kamut, freekeh or farro? How 'bout einkorn or teff? Sound like a misfit cast of foreign-born Muppets? Wrong! They are ancient grains and edible history that are increasingly being featured alongside other health-oriented trends at restaurants across the country. These ancient grains are the kind of ingredients that would make Mark Bittman and Michael Pollan salivate. Unlike their starchy, processed counterparts, these fiber packed carbs are 100% tinker-free, and also far more nutritious. "One reason ancient grains have become so popular is because they have such distinct character, not to mention great nutritional value," says Maria Speck, author of *Ancient Grains for Modern Meals*. "I cherish chewy rye berries for their slight tanginess. I love the nuttiness in wheat berries, the natural sweetness of oats and the tender chew of brown rice."

Quinoa, the grain that started it all, originates from South America and was referred to as sacred and the "mother of all grains," by the Incas. Chestnut flour, once highly sought after in ancient Rome, became the staple for many Italians during World War II, when they transformed the nut into baking-ready flour. Amaranth is an Aztec grain that dates back at least 8,000 years. Teff, eaten primarily in northeast Africa and prominently used in Ethiopian and Eritrean cuisine to make the flatbread *injera*, has been cultivated for thousands of years as well.

Ancient grains are pure, whole nuggets of nutrition and the foundation of a new wave of cooking based on old principles that is making the health conscious go mainstream.

"Countless restaurants across America now feature ancient grains on their menus," Speck says. "Oliveto in Oakland, California (oliveto.com), and of course Blue Hill at Stone Barns north of New York City (bluehillfarm.com),



EAT LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

It's pretty easy to eat ancient when you're traveling, just follow the high-end gluten-free trail.

ANCIENT GRAINS BAKERY uses millet, teff, sorghum, buckwheat and amaranth for everything from pie crusts to biscotti. Lawrence, KS (50 miles from Kansas City) ancientgrainsbakery.com

SLOW FOOD BOSTON hosted a special evening on ancient grains at chef Jason Bond's Bondir with a menu that included bulgur-lentil soup with minted olive oil butter, lamb burgers with bulgur and mint with lemony yogurt dip, artichoke rosemary tart with polenta crust and wheat berry fools with Grand Marnier figs. bondircambridge.com

SNACK DRAGON in New York's Lower East Side offers an overstuffed taco, a blue corn tortilla filled with spicy quinoa, black beans, mild tomato salsa, shredded Monterey Jack cheese and tart yogurt sauce for three bucks. The nutty grain is made into a pilaf with scallions, cilantro, and red pepper and can be eaten on its own. snackdragon.com

where chef Dan Barber showcases his passion for grains such as Emmer wheat, oats and flint corn. In the Boston area, you'll regularly find ancient grains on the menu at Bondir (bondircambridge.com) or West Bridge (westbridgerestaurant.com)."

Chef Brandon Sharp, who won a "Healthy Cooking" award from *Cooking Light* for his work at the Solage Calistoga Resort in Napa Valley (solagecalistoga.com), favors freekeh—also known as farik in the Middle East and North Africa. Made from roasted green wheat, it's high in protein and fiber. At Solage's Solbar restaurant, the grains are laced throughout the main courses: roasted chicken with preserved lemon freekeh and caper-raisin sauce and grilled yellowfin tuna with baby artichokes, toasted farro and prosciutto-mustard vinaigrette.



At The Peninsula Beverly Hills (peninsula.com), Executive Chef James Overbaugh is a fan of quinoa. In fact, quinoa linguine is one of the most popular dishes on the hotel's room service menu.

Los Angeles' Crossroads (crossroadskitchen.com) chef Tal Ronnen's plant-based mushroom and farro sliders are patties of farro with minced beets, mushrooms and broccolini that basically mimic ground beef.

Feel like learning to incorporate ancient grains into your go-to dishes? Pop into LA-based sisters Heather Goldberg and Jenny Engel's vegan laboratory, SporkFoods (sporkfoods.com). Cook, kibitz and eat your way through an endless array of whole grains.

As the number of diners on gluten-free diets grows, chefs are responding with more inventive ways of incorporating grains into entrées. But, ultimately, ancient grains aren't popping up in modern cuisine because they're historic, more nutritious or trendy, it's because they have textures and flavors that are unmatched even after centuries of farming improvements.

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