

## Old Grains Make a Comeback

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The other day in the health food store I came across a cereal called Kamut. What I found was that Kamut is not just the idea of the marketing department, but, in fact, the main ingredient of the cereal. I bought a box, went home, and looked it up in my food and nutrition encyclopedia only to find that it is not listed. I called the manufacturer and found that there is a Kamut Association of North America. I also found out the following: Kamut may have been harvested up to 6,000 years ago in ancient Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The kernel is two to three times larger than a standard red wheat kernel. It is high in protein. A 1988 crop was analyzed and found to contain 17 percent protein compared to 12 percent for wheat. Vitamin and mineral levels were also comparable to wheat, with the exception of zinc and magnesium, which are higher in Kamut.<sup>2</sup> Kamut is slightly more expensive to produce.<sup>1</sup> It is also hypoallergenic. Seventy percent of people with wheat allergies consume Kamut with no problem.<sup>3</sup> The taste? This author thinks it tastes great. Maybe a little smoother than whole wheat.

As long as I'm selling cereal, the Kamut cereal I bought also contains the grains amaranth and quina (pronounced keen-wa). Amaranth was a staple for the Aztecs and quina was one of the main grains consumed by the Incas. Amaranth is a very tiny golden kernel about the size of coarse ground pepper. Quina kernels are slightly larger and look like round sesame seeds. Both are very high in protein with mild, nut-like flavors (amaranth is slightly stronger). They can be used for a rice or potato substitute, in soups or stews, or as hot cereal.

Most Americans get the majority of their calories, and thus nutrients, from less than 15 foods. Eating a wider variety of fruits, vegetables, and grains ensures that our bodies receive nature's full spectrum of micronutrients, including substances not yet discovered.

Today's final comeback grain is white wheat. There are 14 species of wheat, one of which is called common wheat. Ninety-five percent of the wheat grown in the United States is the common variety. There are four main types of common wheat: hard red winter, hard red spring, soft red winter, and white.<sup>4</sup> Midwest farmers have for years grown the hard red variety. However, it is not uncommon that they would find occasional white wheat stalks in their crops. Usually these were discarded, because the white wheat sprouted rapidly after harvesting, and this made processing difficult.

Today new technology has eliminated this problem.<sup>5</sup>

White wheat is light colored with golden flecks. Its taste is closer to that of processed white flour (mild or bland, depending on your taste buds, when compared to white wheat). It is also easier to use in baking than regular whole wheat flour. Although this author prefers a whole wheat flour to white flour for taste alone, in addition to its nutritional superiority, many Americans have begun to eat whole wheat simply because it is more nutritious. If they had their choice, they prefer the taste of processed white flour. With the comeback of white, whole wheat, many people can now have their cake and eat it, too.

### *References*

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