

Savory Barley Soup with Wild Mushrooms and Thyme

Barley is an ancient grain that deserves a larger role in the modern kitchen. It's an excellent source of minerals, especially selenium, as well as dietary fiber that helps regulate cholesterol. Pureeing a little of this rich barley-mushroom soup gives it a creamy texture. If you have a Parmigiano-Reggiano rind on hand, add it to the broth as it simmers for a boost in flavor.

Rinse the porcinis well to remove any dirt or grit. In a small saucepan over medium-high heat, bring the wine to a simmer. Remove from the heat and add the porcinis; let stand for 15 minutes. Drain the porcinis over a bowl, reserving the liquid, then finely chop them.

In a large, heavy pot over medium-high heat, warm the olive oil. Add the shallots and garlic and cook, stirring frequently, until the shallots are wilted, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the creminis, thyme, the ¼ tsp. salt and the ¼ tsp. pepper. Cook until the creminis release their juices and begin to brown, 4 to 5 minutes. Add the reserved wine, bring to a boil and cook, stirring to scrape up the browned bits from the pan bottom, for 1 minute. Add the broth, barley, tomato paste, water and chopped porcinis. Cover and simmer until the barley is tender to the bite, 45 to 50 minutes.

In a blender or food processor, puree about 1 cup of the soup until smooth. Return the soup to the pot and heat until just hot, then stir in the lemon juice. Season the soup with salt and pepper. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Eat Well*, by Charity Ferreira (Oxmoor House, 2008).

Barley with Crisped Prosciutto and Truffle Oil

Aromatic prosciutto, rosemary and a drizzle of truffle oil transform humble, hearty barley into a side dish fit for royalty. Try a mixture of pearl barley and hulled barley, blending the comforting creaminess of pearl barley with just enough chewy whole grain. Feel free to use one or the other. Drizzle with truffle oil only at the table to make the most of the aroma of this pricey ingredient; you can use a good-quality olive oil in its place, if you must, or if you're serving it as an everyday side dish.

To prepare the barley, in a saucepan, combine the water, hulled barley, pearl barley, bay leaf and the ¼ tsp. salt and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer, cover and cook until the grain is tender but still slightly chewy, about 40 minutes. Discard the bay leaf. Remove from the heat and, if you have time, let the barley sit, covered, for 5 to 10 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasonings with salt. Drain any remaining liquid, return the barley to the pan and cover.

To finish, in a fry pan over medium heat, warm the olive oil until shimmering. Add the prosciutto and cook, stirring frequently, until lightly browned and starting to crisp, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a small bowl. Stir the rosemary and two-thirds of the crisped prosciutto into the barley. Sprinkle with the remaining prosciutto and serve immediately. Pass the truffle oil at the table so everyone can add a drizzle on top. Serves 4.

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Ingredients for Savory Barley Soup with Wild Mushrooms and Thyme

½ oz. dried porcini mushrooms

½ cup dry white wine

1 Tbs. olive oil

½ cup chopped shallots

2 garlic cloves, minced

8 oz. cremini mushrooms, chopped

1 tsp. minced fresh thyme or ½ tsp. dried

¼ tsp. salt, plus more, to taste

¼ tsp. freshly ground pepper, plus more, to taste

3 cups chicken broth

¾ cup pearl barley

1 Tbs. tomato paste

3 cups water

2 tsp. fresh lemon juice

Ingredients for Barley with Crisped Prosciutto and Truffle Oil

For the barley:

2 cups water

½ cup hulled barley, soaked overnight and drained

½ cup pearl barley

1 small bay leaf

¼ tsp. fine sea salt, plus more, to taste

To finish:

1 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil

2 oz. chopped prosciutto (about ½ cup)

1 tsp. finely chopped fresh rosemary

Truffle oil for drizzling

A Cornucopia of Grains

- Amaranth
- Barley
- Buckwheat
- Bulgur
- Cornmeal
- Couscous
- Grits
- Hominy
- Kasha
- Millet
- Oats
- Polenta
- Quinoa
- Rice
- Rye
- Sorghum
- Teff
- Triticale
- Wheat (farro, kamut, spelt)
- Wild rice

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Technique Class: Grains: Old-World Staple, New-World Power Food

What Is a Grain?

Quite literally, a world of grains awaits the adventurous cook eager to journey beyond tried-and-true staples such as rice and oats. In all their various forms, these edible seeds of cultivated grasses or other plants are outstanding sources of carbohydrates, fiber, protein and other nutrients like phytochemicals—the nutrients that lower blood cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of colon and other cancers, diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Unfortunately, in our modern diet the consumption of whole grains has sharply dropped over the past several decades and has been replaced by refined grains, usually in the form of white wheat flour and white rice, with the fiber-rich hull and the nutrient-rich germ removed.

Whole grains come in a variety of colors and have more flavor than refined grains. This, combined with their nutritional value, makes them equal companions to meats and vegetables. It's time to explore the world of whole grains and reintroduce flavor, texture, color and excellent nutrition to your favorite recipes.

Storing: Any whole grains, or cracked grains made from whole grains, will still contain their germ, which is rich in oil. For this reason, they are prone to turning rancid relatively quickly. Buy in small quantities, no more than you will use within a few months. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 6 months. By contrast, polished grains—those that have been hulled and de-germed—generally will keep in an airtight container at cool room temperature for up to 1 year.

Grain Terminology

Berries: Plump individual whole grains, particularly of wheat and rye.

Endosperm: The soft inner portion of grain, loaded with nutrients; often the only part of it that is eaten.

Flake: Flat pieces of grain formed either by pressing between high-pressured rollers or by fine slicing.

Germ: The embryo contained within every whole grain, which would grow if the grain were planted and watered. The oil-rich germ is often removed during milling to prevent flour from going rancid. It is nutritious, however, and is often sold separately.

Hull: The tough outer husk of some grains such as barley, oats and rice.

Pearl: A term for polishing grains like barley to remove their tough hulls.

Rolled: Applies particularly to oats that are hulled and then steamed and flattened between rollers for quick-cooking flakes.

Ingredients for Farrotto with Porcini and Pecorino

1 oz. dried porcini mushrooms, steeped in 1 cup boiling water for 30 minutes

4 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

1 garlic clove, crushed flat but left whole

1 lb. mixed fresh mushrooms, such as cremini, portobello and shiitake, sliced

½ tsp. chopped fresh thyme

1 large shallot, finely chopped

1½ cups farro, rinsed and drained

⅓ cup dry white wine

4 cups chicken broth, preferably homemade, heated to a simmer

1 Tbs. balsamic vinegar

½ cup grated pecorino romano cheese, plus a handful of shaved pieces for garnish

Ingredients for Farrotto with Porcini and Pecorino (Farrotto con Porcini e Pecorino)

Ingredients for Israeli Couscous with Squash, Feta and Almonds

¾ cup almonds

1 Tbs. chopped fresh sage

2 tsp. salt, plus more, to taste

1 tsp. ground cinnamon

1 tsp. chili powder

1 tsp. freshly ground pepper

2 acorn squashes, about 2½ lb. total

1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling

2 cups Israeli couscous

6 oz. feta cheese, crumbled

¼ cup minced fresh mint, plus sprigs for garnish

Ingredients for Roasted Vegetable and Farro Soup (Zuppa di Farro con Verdura)

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Risotto-Style Farro with Porcini and Pecorino (Farrotto con Porcini e Pecorino)

Author Domenica Marchetti was introduced to farro years ago at a wonderful restaurant in Lucca, where it was used in a hearty soup with beans. The grain’s appealing chewy-tender texture and earthy flavor also make it perfect for this risotto-style dish.

Drain the porcini, reserving the liquid. Chop the mushrooms and strain the broth into a clean bowl through a fine-mesh sieve lined with a damp paper towel. Set aside.

In a fry pan over medium heat, warm 2 Tbs. of the olive oil and the garlic. Add the fresh mushrooms and the porcini and stir gently to coat them with the oil. Sprinkle in the thyme and cook, stirring often, until the mushrooms are tender and a little browned, about 10 minutes. Discard the garlic. Set the mushrooms aside.

In a large, heavy-bottomed sauté pan over medium-low heat, combine the remaining 2 Tbs. olive oil and the shallot and sauté until the shallot is softened, about 5 minutes. Add the farro and stir until well coated with the oil, about 2 minutes. Increase the heat to medium-high, pour in the wine and reserved porcini liquid, and stir until the liquid has been absorbed. Reduce the heat to medium and add a ladleful or two of the hot broth. Cook, stirring from time to time (you don’t have to stir it constantly), until the broth has been absorbed. Continue to cook, adding broth as needed, until the farro is tender but still pleasantly chewy, 25 to 30 minutes total; during the last 5 minutes of cooking, stir in the reserved mushrooms.

Stir in the vinegar and grated cheese. Spoon the farrotto into a serving bowl, scatter the shaved cheese on top and serve immediately. Serves 4 to 6.

Wine suggestion: Chianti Classico or other Sangiovese-based Tuscan red.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Rustic Italian, by Domenica Marchetti (Weldon Owen, 2011).

Israeli Couscous with Squash, Feta and Almonds

Israeli couscous is larger and more substantial than the familiar North African variety and makes an excellent base for an unusual pasta salad with a bounty of flavorful ingredients. Serve this as a first course or as part of a holiday buffet.

Preheat an oven to 350°F.

Place the almonds in a single layer on a baking sheet and bake, stirring once or twice, until fragrant and lightly toasted, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer to a plate and let cool. Leave the oven on.

In a small bowl, combine the sage, 1 tsp. of the salt, the cinnamon, chili powder and pepper and stir well.

Peel the squashes. Cut each squash crosswise into rings about 1 inch thick and discard the seeds. Rub the cut sides with the 1 Tbs. olive oil. Arrange the rings on

Ingredients for Roasted Vegetable and Farro Soup (Zuppa di Farro con Verdura)

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Holiday Entertaining, by Georgeanne Brennan (Oxmoor House, 2007).

a baking sheet and rub both sides with the sage mixture. Roast until lightly browned and easily pierced with a knife, about 1 hour. Cut each ring into 4 sections.

Rinse the couscous in cold water and let drain in a colander for about 10 minutes. Fill a saucepan half full with water and bring to a boil over high heat. Add the couscous and cook until tender, about 20 minutes. Drain in the colander.

Transfer the couscous to a warmed platter. Drizzle with a little olive oil and gently fluff, separating the grains with your fingertips. Season with the remaining 1 tsp. salt, then taste and adjust the seasonings.

To serve, sprinkle the couscous with the feta cheese, almonds and minced mint. Turn gently to distribute the ingredients and then fold in the squash. Garnish with the mint sprigs and serve warm or at room temperature. Serves 8.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Holiday Entertaining, by Georgeanne Brennan (Oxmoor House, 2007).

Roasted Vegetable and Farro Soup (Zuppa di Farro con Verdura)

This nourishing soup is a specialty from the mountains of northwestern Tuscany. Here, dark green lacinato kale replaces the usual smoked pancetta.

In a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine the beans, garlic, rosemary, thyme and sage sprigs, bay leaf and 2 Tbs. of the olive oil. Add water to cover by 1 inch and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer gently until the beans are tender, about 30 minutes. Remove from the heat and discard the herb sprigs. Cover to keep warm.

In a soup pot over medium-low heat, warm the remaining 3 Tbs. olive oil. Stir in the carrots, celery, onion and minced herbs and sauté until the onion is softened, 7 to 8 minutes. Stir in the kale and cook until wilted and just tender, 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in the tomato puree, salt and chili and increase the heat to medium. Add the broth and water and bring to a boil.

Stir in the farro and the cooked beans with their liquid. Bring the soup to a boil, cover partially and reduce the heat to medium-low. Simmer gently until the farro is tender but not mushy, about 40 minutes. Sprinkle in the basil and remove from the heat. Discard the bay leaf. Let stand for about 5 minutes, then ladle the soup into bowls, garnish with cheese and a drizzle of olive oil and serve immediately. Serves 4 to 6.

Wine suggestion: A low-tannin red, such as Langhe Rosso or Barbera d’Alba.

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