

Wheat 101

By Kris Kemker

How many of us go down to our basements and blankly stare at the boxes and boxes of wheat and other food storage items we have stored down there? If you're thinking that's you, you're not alone. That was me until almost a year ago. It was then that I actually found out that there was more to wheat than just making bread.

Generally low in fat with little or no cholesterol, whole grain foods are rich in complex carbohydrates, including dietary fiber, and contain important vitamins and minerals and other components that play a role in keeping us healthy. Whole grain foods are important sources of both soluble and insoluble fiber. The kernel of wheat is a vital storehouse of nutrients and un-absorbable fiber (roughage) needed and used by man since the dawn of civilization.

We have been consuming wheat for thousands of years.

Wheat is the king of grains and ranks first in nutritional value. These little kernels are packed with protein, 16 minerals and 10 vitamins, including vitamin E. When sprouted, the wheat kernel yields a whole new array of nutritional benefits. Whole grains may help reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer and diabetes. They are also high in antioxidants, sometimes even higher than fruits and vegetables. WOW! And I have a basement loaded with this stuff.

Do we know why we are asked to store so much of this wonderful little kernel? Besides the health benefits, the wheat kernel, when properly stored has a shelf life of 30 years or longer. WOW again!

Okay, so we have all this wonderful wheat stored in shiny #10 cans and packed in easy to manage boxes somewhere in our homes. If an emergency ever arose and we had to open one of those cans, would we know how to use it to feed ourselves and our families? A very wise friend of mine gave me the answer when she said "just add water". All I need to prepare wheat for my family is to just add water. Cook up a pile of wheat berries and go from there. Even though a wheat grinder is wonderful to have it's not necessary to enjoy the benefits of eating healthy.

So this is where it gets fun! There are so many ways in which to prepare wheat and incorporating it into your daily diet. The possibilities are limitless. Let's get going!!

Wheat Berries

Wheat berries are nothing more than the wheat kernel cooked or boiled in water until tender. It can be added to just about anything and is great to use as a meat extender. When a dear friend of mine started adding wheat berries to her families favorite everyday foods, she said that her daughters dig that there is fifty percent less red meat and one hundred percent more whole grain. Smart girls! Eat them warm as a breakfast cereal, add them to soups, casseroles, main dishes and salads or mix them with rice. The possibilities are endless.

4 cups raw wheat
10 cups water
1 tbsp salt

Oil a 4 qt. or larger slow cooker. Add the wheat, water and salt. Cook overnight on low or 8 to 10 hours. Drain any remaining liquid. Divide into baggies and store in the refrigerator for at least a week or in the freezer for months.

Whole wheat flour

Whole wheat flour is a wonderful addition to any baked product. Instead of using all white flour, try using half white and half whole wheat; 50% less white flour – 100% more whole wheat goodness. Gradually work your way to making everything with whole wheat flour. Wheat flour can also be used to thicken gravies and soups.

Whole wheat flour is best used fresh. Keep left over flour in the refrigerator for optimal nutrition until used.

Electric grinders are wonderful for ease of making flour but a hand cranked grinder is necessary for use during a power outage.

Wheat flour can also be made into gluten or "wheat meat".

Gluten is the nitrogenous, tough, sticky substance that remains in the flour when the starch is taken out and is a vegetarian alternative to meat that is made from the protein of wheat.

For more information on making wheat meat, check it out on the world wide web.

Sprouted wheat

Sprouts are considered a “living food” and are most beneficial to our health. When the wheat kernel is sprouted nutrition quadruples in some of the vitamins and minerals. The fiber content increases three to four times that of whole wheat bread. Wheat sprouts are tender and sweet to the taste and very easy to sprout. All you need is a wide mouth jar, cheese cloth or fine mesh, a canning ring or rubber band and some water.

1- Place 1/4 cup wheat berries in a quart canning jar (or similar regular jar) and fill with lukewarm water.

2- Place cheesecloth over the mouth and secure with jar ring or rubber band.

3 -Drain water through the cheesecloth, fill again, and let soak overnight.

4 -In the morning rinse seeds, drain and rinse again. Drain seeds again making sure they are drained well.

5- Place jar on its side in a dark place or at least out of the direct sun.

6- Rinse and drain twice a day for 2-4 days or until sprouts are formed. Place the sprouts in a colander, rinse with cold water, drain and store in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Enjoy! Makes approximately 2 cups.

Use sprouted wheat in salads, breads, on sandwiches or just enjoy them plain.

Fiesta Wheat and Bean Salad

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1 green pepper, diced
1 orange or red pepper, diced
1 bunch fresh cilantro, leaves chopped
1 small jalapeno pepper, cored and diced
Juice of 1 lime
3 cups cooked wheat berries
1 can corn, drained (16 oz.)

1 can black beans, drained (or 2 cups cooked black beans from your food storage)
2 tsp chili powder
2 tsp cumin powder
¼ cup cider vinegar
1 tbsp sugar
½ cup vegetable oil
1 tsp salt

Combine all ingredients in a bowl. Toss well. Chill for at least 1 hour before serving. Serve as a salsa with tortilla chips or as a side dish.

Words of wisdom from a 9 year old: “After reading this, people will know that wheat is an important thing in their lives” and “wheat berries are so good, you should put them in everything”.

Notes: