



The Grains of African and Latin American Heritage

Did you know that Africa has more native grains than any other continent? It has its own species of rice, along with millet, barley, sorghum, teff, several varieties of wheat, and dozens of other wild grains and cereals.

Many traditional African heritage meals included grains or other starchy mashes paired with stews, spices, and vegetables. Millet, rice, and couscous made from whole wheat were favorite forms of local grains, often eaten as the bed for stewed vegetables. They were also made into porridges, fritters, and flatbreads.

Trade with Portugal and the Americas brought corn (or maize), new wheat varieties, and non-native rice to Africa. These crops eventually took the place of many local grains. Unfortunately, both native and new grains have gone from being whole grain to mainly refined, which has had a negative impact on the health of native Africans. Many scientists are working hard to get traditional whole grains back into both the African and Western diets.

Maize (corn), quinoa, amaranth, barley, rice and wheat are the staple grains in Latin America. Corn is made into hominy and *masa harina*, using traditional methods that make important vitamins more available to your body. Hominy, dried or canned, can be used in the popular Mexican soup, pozole, with meat and a savory broth with fresh toppings. *Masa harina* makes delicious tortillas, tamales and other foods, and can also be stirred into soups and stews as a thickening agent, like most other grains listed here. Barley flour, for example, is often used to thicken hot drinks in Ecuador. Quinoa and amaranth grains can be made into sweet or savory porridges, or ground into flour for baked goods and breads.

Why Are Whole Grains So Good for Us?

Health experts around the world, including the American Heart Association, Harvard School of Public Health, and the USDA, agree that whole grains are a central component of healthy diets. Eating whole grains gives your body extra vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other disease-fighting nutrients. Adding whole grains to your diet can significantly lower your risk of chronic diseases and conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes.

And if that wasn't enough, whole grains are great sources for longer, sustained energy that can keep you going throughout the day.

Delicious, healthy and easy as making white rice, whole grains are a nutritional powerhouse to enjoy everyday.



Barley



Spelt



Millet



Dark Wild Rice



Brown Short Grain Rice



Basmati & Wild Rice



Corn Maize Kernels



Couscous



Amaranth



Black Rice



Quinoa



Oats



Whole Grains Cook Times

Basic boiling instructions for most grains:

Bring water (and salt if using) to a boil, add grain, cover the pot with a lid, and lower the heat to low. Let the grain simmer. The following are suggested cooking times for seven popular grains.

1 Cup	Water	Cook Time	Description
Amaranth	3 cups	25–30 min	Amaranth is an ancient grain, native to Central America. Amaranth becomes sticky when cooked, making a great breakfast porridge. Amaranth kernels can also be popped like popcorn or ground into flour for cereals, breads, and muffins.
Barley	3 ½ cups	60 min	Barley is one of the oldest known grains. Egyptian mummies were buried with necklaces of barley because it was so popular. Barley is great in soups, as a pilaf, or as flour in bread. Barley’s fiber is especially healthy, and it may lower cholesterol more effectively than other fibers.
Cornmeal (polenta/ grits) Always look for “whole cornmeal”	4 cups	15–20 min	Cornmeal can be used for tortillas, <i>arepas</i> , tamales, and stirred into soup. Treating corn with alkali to create <i>masa harina</i> improves its nutritional quality. Grits are ground yellow or white cornmeal cooked to a porridge-like consistency. Grits are a staple side dish in the American South, often topped with spices, vegetables, and sauces.
Millet	2 ½ cups	Toast: 3 min; Simmer: 20–25 min	Fluffy and nutty (when toasted); grown and enjoyed throughout Africa and South America. Let millet sit uncovered for 10 minutes before serving.
Quinoa	2 cups	12-15 min	Quinoa is a South American grain that is known as a “perfect protein” – meaning it has all the essential amino acids our bodies need. It’s also a good source of iron and magnesium.
Brown Rice (especially long-grain)	2 cups	45 min	Rice is one of the most easily-digested grains and provides half the calories for up to half of the world’s population, especially in parts of Africa, South America, Asia and the Indies. Brown rice still has the bran and germ intact and provides many more health benefits than white rice.
Wild Rice	3 cups	45 min	Wild rice grows in streams and other watery lands throughout the world. You can usually recognize wild rice in the U.S. by its multiple colors, typically available as a mix of brown, black, purple, and/or red rice. Wild rice is usually very chewy and full-flavored, and makes for a beautiful, hearty side dish.