

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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### What's a Quinoa?

With all the fuss about super foods, super fruit this and super fruit that, it's understandable that someone might think that this member of the super-list is a fruit too. But it's not a fruit. And as much as it might act like a grain, it's really not a grain either. It is however a seed, a very small seed. It is an old food, one that's been on the edible list for thousands of years. And it is a very nutritious food as well.

Quinoa is pronounced keen-wa or keen-a-wa. The plant is native to the very high elevations of Peru and Bolivia, and the seeds were being eaten by the Incas when the Spaniards arrived in the 1500s. The seeds are tiny, so it takes a lot of them to make a meal, but it was considered a sacred food and valued very highly.

They might be mistaken for a grain, but actually they are more closely related to red beets and spinach than they are to wheat or rye. That's an advantage in this time of so much wheat allergy. Because quinoa is not related to the true grains it does not have the proteins that cause allergic reactions. It is safe for people with gluten allergy or intolerance.

Until 10 or 15 years ago quinoa was barely known outside of the high Andes. Part of the reason was that the seeds from the native plants had a very bitter compound in their skin. The seeds needed to be soaked, then rubbed in a sieve and rinsed multiple times to remove the bitter parts before they could be eaten. No one who wasn't used to all the preparation wanted to bother with them. But as the nutritional value was

realized food processors went into action. Now we can buy quinoa that has been pretreated to remove the bitter compounds. All we need to do is cook it and enjoy.

Do read the package instructions, some brands may still need to be soaked and rinsed before they are cooked. If you skip that step not only will the quinoa have a bitter flavor but you will no longer have any constipation problems!

Unlike grains, quinoa has a lot more protein, especially some of the amino acids that grains are often lacking. Its protein is actually considered a complete protein, meaning it has the full balance of amino acids that humans need. It is also a good source of several minerals that are not usually found in large amounts in grain: calcium, phosphorous, magnesium and even iron. And it is a good source of dietary fiber as well. You can see why the Incans liked this seed even if they couldn't identify all the nutrients in it!

On the market today you may find red or the more common pale golden varieties. Both are boiled the same way you would boil rice. Usually you would use twice as much water as quinoa to start. It only takes 10-15 minutes to cook until it's just tender. Or, use your rice cooker to prepare exactly as you would rice. It will fluff up as it cooks, not sticky or heavy as some rice can be. And it has a slightly nutty flavor. That means it goes well with everything from fruit and milk for breakfast to onions and peppers for dinner.

Many people prefer to prepare it using chicken or meat broth rather than plain water. That adds some extra flavor without adding a lot of ingredients. You can use it with any sauce or topping that you would put over rice or pasta. It also makes a great stuffing instead of bread or rice in poultry. Or cook with water, add milk or cream, a

touch of honey and some fruit for a high protein, satisfying breakfast.

Here's a recipe that could be served with chicken, fish or a roast of pork. It's a little sweet and a little savory, but not spicy at all. Enjoy a sacred Incan food!

#### Fruit and Nutty Quinoa

2 cups water or vegetable broth	1 cup quinoa, rinsed and drained
¼ cup dark or golden raisins	¼ cup diced dried apricots or apples
2 Tbsp minced fresh thyme leaves	¼ cup chopped pecans, toasted

Bring water or broth to boil in medium saucepan. Add quinoa and a pinch of salt if desired. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer for 14-15 minutes, until all water is absorbed. Stir in fruit and thyme. To serve, top with toasted pecans (almonds or walnuts also work well.) Serve hot or cold. Serves 6.