

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

e-mail: [mkeith@ufl.edu](mailto:mkeith@ufl.edu)

Purple Rice!?

As if there weren't enough new, strange foods (chocolate covered bacon or deep fried butter for example) around these days, now our good, old, plain standby - white rice - has turned purple! Or black, or red! If you take a look at the rice shelves in the grocery you will find it right there, alongside the white. Of course it has the exotic factor: something new, different, 'Forbidden', used for 100s of years in Country XYZ. But a caller wanted to know what else it has, and is it really nutritionally better? Or is it just another pretty color?

They certainly are different colors. Some are almost black, but turn purple or pink when they're cooked. Others are dark golden/red brown, much darker than our usual brown rice. Some are actually rather speckled. Some have been used for generations in Asia. If you like the idea of pink or purple rice beside your grilled fish, you can now have it without having to go to China to get it!

Most of the color is in the bran or hull of the grain. If the rice were polished most of the color would be lost, along with whatever nutrients are in the hull. The rice bran has vitamin E. Vitamin E, besides being necessary as a vitamin and a good antioxidant itself, is also tied to a variety of other health benefits. But, there does not seem to be a link between how dark the bran is and how much vitamin E it has.

As with many of our fruits and vegetables, the pigments that give the hull color are also good for us. Those colors can be antioxidants, anti-cancer compounds, things that help our blood pressure, our memory or more. The more colors we get in our foods, the better off we're likely to be. So that's a good thing.

But as the researchers at USDA who have been studying these rice varieties discovered, not all those pigment antioxidants are easily available. Some are fairly free, meaning that we can probably digest and absorb them easily from the rice. Others however are tied tightly onto the walls of the bran. We cannot digest the bran, that's the fiber. The bacteria in our intestines can break some of the antioxidants off the bran. But some of these antioxidants that are tied to the bran are

probably not going to be easy for us to digest or use.

The amounts that are free or tied up vary among varieties. Some have more of one, others less. The pale brown varieties we usually see in the store tend to have more easily available antioxidants. But it is still very hard to say if we're going to get much, or any, or how much nutritional boost by eating purple or red rice.

Another problem that the USDA folks discovered is that the darker the color of the rice grains, the stronger their flavors. So black rice was described as having dark-berry, oily, medicinal and burnt-smoky flavors. Red rice had more flavors that were described as being beany, earthy or wet-dog like. Most of the dark varieties were called bitter, or left an astringent feel in the mouths of the testers. Whether they have antioxidants for us or not, if people don't like the taste they're not likely to be eating more purple rice.

Of course, rice breeders are actively trying to get rice with dark colors and good taste. USDA and private researchers are working on it, but it will take years. In the meantime, if you like purple, red or black rice, go right ahead and try some. You'll probably get at least a little more health protection from those antioxidants. It's a little bit sweeter than brown rice, and takes a little longer to cook. But you can be the talk of the party when you bring a big bowl of purple rice pudding!

If you're not ready for that, stick with brown rice. Here's a healthy casserole with plenty of color of its own. If you don't have fresh mushrooms, use a 4 oz can, drained well. Serve with some baked fish, and fruit for dessert. Enjoy!

#### Broccoli-Rice Casserole

½ cup sliced fresh mushrooms	¼ cup chopped onion
½ cup chopped red or green sweet pepper	1 large egg
1 10-oz pkg frozen chopped broccoli	2 cups cooked brown rice
½ cup evaporated fat-free milk	½ tsp salt
½ tsp ground pepper	¼ tsp sweet paprika (optional)
¾ cup shredded 50% reduced fat cheddar cheese (or part pepper jack for more flavor)	

Thaw broccoli. Preheat oven to 375°F. Coat 2 qt baking dish with pan spray. Mix mushrooms, sweet peppers and onion in large bowl with 1 Tbsp of water. Cover and microwave on HIGH for 2 minutes. Drain. Stir in broccoli and rice. Add egg, milk, salt, pepper and paprika. Mix well. Spoon half into sprayed baking dish. Sprinkle with half the cheese. Add rest of vegetables. Bake 15 minutes. Remove from oven, add rest of cheese to top. Bake 10 minutes longer. Serve hot. Serves 6.

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