

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Quinoa - A Cold-Loving Plant

Quinoa. Strange name, strange shape, maybe strange taste, what is it anyway, and why is it so popular? Even if you haven't bought a bag of plain quinoa to cook, you've surely seen it advertised as an ingredient in cereals and crackers. You might have had to ask how to pronounce it. It's *keen-wha*, not quin-o-a.

Take a look at the seeds. You'll find them alongside the rice in the grocery store. They're tiny, about the size of a pinhead. Some are tan-colored, some more golden brown, some are very dark brown, almost coffee-colored. They're not much bigger when they're cooked.

Quinoa is originally from South America, parts of Chile, Peru and Bolivia. It only grows at very high elevations, preferably over 7,000 ft. Here in Florida we barely get over 300 ft up in the Panhandle. So don't expect to raise any in your garden! It also likes short days and cold weather. Some is being grown in Colorado, but when they tried to grow it in Minnesota it would never make seeds. The weather was *too warm* for it! In Minnesota! Brrrr! That is one cold-loving plant!

Quinoa is part of the family of plants that includes spinach and beets. It's not really a grain, and it has much less starch than most of our grains. But it does have more protein than many of them. Barley and buckwheat are the only two that have more protein than quinoa, although wheat is not very far behind. That's part of the reason why it has become so popular. People are trying to avoid carbs and increase their protein. So quinoa fits the bill.

It also has more minerals than most grains. The exception is sodium - quinoa has less sodium, a whole lot less than either corn or wheat. Of course we usually add salt to both corn and wheat to improve their flavor, and if you add salt to quinoa you'll add a lot of sodium too.

It's easy to cook quinoa. All it needs is boiling water. But do read the label on the package. The old traditional varieties had a bitter skin on the seeds that had to be soaked then rubbed off. Some of the newer varieties don't need that pre-soaking and rubbing, but I did see one package in the grocery that still called for that. Most do need to at least be rinsed several times in a sieve. Just

follow the directions. And be sure to use a fine sieve, so that you don't lose the tiny little seeds down the drain.

Use just a little more water than you have quinoa seed. Recipes often call for salt, but that adds sodium. Quinoa has a pleasant, nutty flavor by itself, and depending on what else you will be serving or cooking with it, it may not need the salt. Just put the water and quinoa in a saucepan, cover the pan and bring it to a boil. It should be done in 15 to 20 minutes.

The grains will puff up some as they cook, and should be tender, not hard. Drain off any extra water (in the sieve), so that it doesn't get mushy after it's cooked. Fluff it with a fork when you take it off the heat. Then put the covered pan back on the warm burner and let it sit for another 15 minutes or so. That will also help keep it from getting mushy.

At this point you can use it as you would rice. Put sauces or stews on top of it. Add seasoned oil. Serve it instead of rice with almost any meal. Popping the quinoa first brings out the nutty flavor. This recipe combines quinoa with kid-pleasing broccoli and cheese. Enjoy!

Cheesy Quinoa and Broccoli

2 C chopped broccoli

1 ½ C vegetable broth, warmed

1 C quinoa

1 C shredded low fat Cheddar cheese

salt, pepper to taste

Rinse quinoa in fine sieve until water runs clear. Spread on a cookie sheet and allow to dry. If using frozen broccoli, thaw and drain. Put quinoa in dry saucepan and heat over medium high while stirring until it is popping, about 6 minutes. Add broth to quinoa in saucepan. Bring to boil, cover and reduce heat to medium low. Simmer 15 minutes. Stir in broccoli, cover and continue cooking until quinoa and broccoli are tender, about 5 to 7 minutes. Remove from heat. Stir cheese into mixture, cover and set aside until cheese melts. Season with salt and pepper if desired. Serves 4.

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