

BE WELL

Get a Bang from your Buckwheat

By Debbie DeAngelo
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Are you eating buckwheat? If not, you're missing out on an extremely nutritious and delicious ancient grain.

Although commonly referred to as a grain, buckwheat is actually a seed. It's dubbed a pseudograin because from a culinary and nutrition perspective, it's similar to other whole grains. What's more, it's not even a form of wheat, making it a gluten-free pick.

Buckwheat has inhabited the Earth for 6,000 years. It was introduced to this country in the 1800s but fell out of favor with the inception of agricultural advances in growing wheat and corn. In the 1970s, buckwheat made a comeback, yet many of us haven't tried it. People who enjoy buckwheat often describe it as having a strong, nutty flavor. Some find that it has slightly bitter overtones.

If you need a reason to incorporate this healthy choice into your diet, then you're in luck. It has numerous benefits. Buckwheat is rich in disease-fighting antioxidants such as quercetin and rutin, which are also found in apples and citrus fruits. It provides more antioxidants than other whole grains like oats, wheat, and barley. It imparts the minerals magnesium, iron, and manganese. Compared to other grains, the minerals in buckwheat are more easily absorbed by the body.

Fiber abounds in buckwheat, and it's the soluble type that lowers cholesterol levels. As a bonus, it's also a resistant starch. That means it's more readily fermented by the bacteria in your digestive tract, serving as food for probiotic production, and is a carbohydrate that doesn't trigger a spike in blood sugar levels. Along with all these nutritional advantages, it confers some high-quality protein too. One cup of cooked buckwheat groats contains 156 calories, 5.7 grams of protein, 1 gram of fat, and 1.5 grams of sugar (0 grams of added sugar).

Buckwheat is available in many forms. The whole grain kernels are called groats. They can be found raw, which would be cooked like rice, or toasted. Buckwheat flour is a versatile form that is easily assimilated into the diet. Additionally, there are many products made from the grain or flour.

Ready to give buckwheat a shot? Here are a few ways to try it.

- Make a bowl of hot breakfast porridge as an alternative to oatmeal.
- Toast groats in a skillet and use it as a crunchy topping on salads.
- Top soba noodles (buckwheat noodles) with steamed or stir-fried vegetables.
- Cook the groats and add to your grain bowl and green salad or substitute for rice in stuffed cabbage and peppers.
- Replace some of the all-purpose flour with buckwheat flour in pancakes, muffins, and breads.

Since it's gluten-free, it won't yield a light, fluffy texture. To counteract this, start off by replacing only 25% of the flour in a non-yeast recipe. Otherwise, use a recipe specifically designed for using buckwheat flour.

Buttermilk-Buckwheat Pancake
(Recipe courtesy of the Whole Grains Council)
Yields 12, 6-inch pancakes

- ¾ c. buckwheat flour
- ¾ c. whole white wheat flour
- 3 T. sugar
- ½ t. salt
- 1 t. baking soda
- 3 T. unsalted butter, melted
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 c. non-fat buttermilk, divided
- Vegetable oil

1. Heat a large griddle pan over medium heat. Prepare batter while pan is heating.
2. Whisk together dry ingredients in a large bowl.
3. In a medium bowl, stir egg and 1 cup of buttermilk until combined, then slowly add in melted butter until incorporated.
4. Add the buttermilk/egg mixture to the dry ingredients, stirring to blend. Add the remaining buttermilk to batter. Stir only until everything is combined, batter may be slightly lumpy. Do not over mix.
5. Using a pastry brush, lightly coat the pan with vegetable oil. Ladle ¼ cup batter (per pancake) onto the hot pan. Reduce the heat to medium-low. Allow the pancakes to cook for 2-3 minutes, or until bubbles come to the surface. Flip pancakes and cook for another 1-2 minutes, or until golden brown.

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