



Wheat Foods Council

GRAINS of TRUTH

Couscous

Definitions

Couscous (pronounced “koos-koos”), a staple of North African cooking, is now widely available in packaged form in most supermarkets. Couscous is yellow granules of semolina made from durum wheat, the ideal pasta wheat, which are precooked and then dried. Actually, the word can mean the pasta itself, as well as North African stews (“tangines”) traditionally served over it.

Like pasta or rice, it can serve many culinary purposes. It is simple to prepare—usually you just add boiling water and let it sit. You can add exotic spices or sauces or leave it plain. It can be a salad base, a filling addition to soups, an accompaniment for meats and vegetables, and if sweetened, spiced and mixed with dried fruits, a dessert.

History

Durum wheat is indigenous to North Africa, so it serves as the main cereal grain for many of the food preparations in these countries. The Portuguese introduced couscous to other parts of the world more than 400 years ago, although the grain has been around for nearly a thousand years. It remains a staple in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. Because the process of making couscous can be done in the home, it is more common than pasta in these regions, and the ability to make it is an admired skill.

Availability

At one time couscous was limited to specialty and health food stores, but now it is widely available in supermarkets, usually where rice, bulgur and pasta are sold. Some companies sell couscous in convenient packages and offer both plain and flavored varieties.

The importing of couscous into the United States is steadily increasing. According to USDA economic research data, in 1989 couscous imports were slightly more than 2.5 million pounds; 1992 data showed that figure to be 5.5 million pounds.

Couscous has been manufactured in the United States since 1993.

Storage

Sealed containers or bags are best for couscous storage to keep moisture out. It will keep well at room temperature or cooler storage. It is not a whole grain product, but optimal flavor will be maintained if warm storage is avoided.

Nutritional Value

Couscous is a good low-fat source of complex carbohydrates. One serving (1/2 cup cooked) contains:

Calories	88
Carbohydrate	18 g
Cholesterol	0 mg
Dietary Fiber	1 g
Fat (Total)	0 g
Folate	12 mcg
Potassium	46 mg
Protein	3 g
Sodium	4 mg
Selenium	22 mcg

Preparation

Couscous is a quick and easy-to-prepare grain dish. Because it is precooked, it can be ready to eat in less than 10 minutes. Once cooked, it can be served hot with a favorite sauce, stew, stir-fry, chilled or stirred into marinated salads with vegetables or even fruit. It can also be used in many of your favorite recipes as a substitute for rice or pasta. When prepared, couscous remains fluffy and separate, and readily takes on the flavors of the other foods cooked or served with it.



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COUSCOUS

1 ¼ cup water or broth
1 tablespoon butter (optional)
1 cup couscous
Dash salt (to taste)

Bring the water or broth to a boil. Add the butter, couscous and salt. Stir, cover and remove from heat. Allow to stand covered for 5 minutes. Stir to fluff and serve. Makes 4, 4-ounce servings.

One serving provides approximately: 197 calories, 6 g protein, 34 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 4 g fat (2 g saturated), 8 mg cholesterol, 8 mcg folate, 0 mg iron, 73 mg potassium and 346 mg sodium.

BREAKFAST COUSCOUS

2 cups hot skim milk
1 cup couscous
1 cup raisins
¼ cup honey

Add couscous to hot milk and honey, cover and let stand 5 minutes; add raisins. Makes 8, 4-ounce servings.

One serving provides approximately: 189 calories, 5 g protein, 43 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 0 g fat, 1 mg cholesterol, 8 mcg folate, 1 mg iron, 279 mg potassium, 37 mg sodium.

EGGS IN COUSCOUS (reduced fat)

1 ½ cups skim milk
1 ½ cups couscous
1 ½ cups (6 ounces) shredded skim mozzarella cheese, divided
2 cups spaghetti sauce
6 eggs
¼ tsp pepper

In a 1- to 2-quart saucepan, bring milk to a boil. Add couscous, cover and remove from heat. Let stand until couscous absorbs milk (about 3 to 4 minutes).

Stir at once with a fork, spoon into a 2-quart baking dish and spread evenly. Sprinkle with 1 cup of the cheese; spoon on spaghetti sauce. Bake covered, in a 400°F oven until sauce is very hot; about 15 to 20 minutes.

Make 6 deep wells in the couscous. Slide 1 egg into each. Sprinkle with remaining cheese and bake, uncovered, until egg yolks are firm, about 10 to 15 minutes. Sprinkle with pepper. Makes 6 servings.

One serving provides approximately: 378 calories, 23 g protein, 45 g carbohydrates, 3 g dietary fiber, 12 g fat (5 g saturated), 223 mg cholesterol, 38 mcg folate, 344 mg calcium, 2 g iron, 261 mg potassium and 575 mg sodium.

SOUTHWEST COUSCOUS

2 Tbsp olive oil
3 green onions, chopped
½ cup red or green bell pepper, coarsely chopped
½ cup sliced fresh mushrooms
½ cup carrots, chopped
1 clove garlic, minced
1¾ cups chicken broth
1 tsp cumin
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp pepper
1 Tbsp dried cilantro, or
3 Tbsp fresh cilantro, chopped
1 16 ounce can chick peas, rinsed and drained
¾ cup uncooked couscous

In a large saucepan, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Add onions, peppers, mushrooms, carrots and garlic; sauté 2 minutes. Stir in chicken broth, cumin, salt, pepper, cilantro and chick peas; bring to a boil. Stir in couscous; remove from heat and cover. Let stand 5 minutes or until liquid is absorbed. Fluff with fork and serve immediately. Makes 10, 5-ounce servings.

One serving provides approximately: 148 calories, 5 g protein, 23 g carbohydrates, 4 g dietary fiber, 4 g fat (1 g saturated), 0 mg cholesterol, 41 mcg folate, 31 mg calcium, 1 mg iron, 186 mg potassium and 329 mg sodium.

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