

# Quinoa - the South American Grain

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**People of the Andes have enjoyed the health benefits of the versatile whole grain called quinoa in soups, stews, drinks, and desserts for hundreds of years.**

Nowadays, quinoa has enjoyed a surge of popularity among health enthusiasts and people dedicated to using traditional grains in modern recipes.

## Health benefits

The grain contains an impressive 12.5% protein. This amount is comparable to that of milk, eggs, and meat. It is an excellent source of vitamins E and C, and contains minerals such as thiamine, riboflavin, phosphorous, and potassium. It also has calcium, making it a good option for the lactose-intolerant. As a source of fiber, it aids digestion. Those watching their cholesterol will be happy to know that it is naturally cholesterol free.

## Botanical information

The botanical name of quinoa is *Chenopodium*, from the *Chenopodiaceae* family. Its common English names are quinoa or quinoa. It thrives in high altitudes, replacing barley and wheat, and is still grown in many South American countries, including Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Chile and Bolivia.

## History

Residues left in pre-hispanic tombs from over 2000 years ago indicate that quinoa was first grown near the shores of Lake Titicaca. The Incas stimulated its cultivation throughout the Andes, from the north of Colombia to the south of Chile.

## Preparation

Before cooking, the quinoa should be thoroughly washed. Remove any small stones, straw, or other impurities that have remained after harvesting (even commercial products will need to be washed. Wash it several times in cold water and strain it through your hands, removing the starchiness. Spread on a flat surface for a few hours to air it out.

## Cooking methods

One kilo of quinoa should be cooked in 2 liters of boiling water. The cooking time varies, depending on the stage of consistency needed for the recipe. These stages are often classified as:

- *punto graneado* (al dente): boil the quinoa for 12 minutes
- *punto reventado* (popped): boil the quinoa for 18 minutes
- *punto atamalado* (thickened): boil for 30 minutes

The liquid that the quinoa is cooked in can be used as a broth in soups, or as a base for drinks similar to [chicha de avena](#).

## Types of quinoa

There are four main types of quinoa:

1. Pearly: the larger grain, often used in soups, or as a breakfast porridge with milk
2. In grain: toasted and used like rice in many dishes. It is also an excellent garnish for meat.
3. Puffed quinoa: similar to puffed corn, sweetened and served with milk (like cornflakes). This type can also be crushed and sprinkled as a sweet, crunchy topping on cakes and ice cream.
4. Flour: used in baking, for making bread, pasta, cakes or cookies. Cooks often use quinoa flour instead of regular wheat flour in order to boost the nutritional value of the food.