



A quinoa dish that can be a side or delicious main

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The first time I heard of quinoa was more than 14 years ago. I was at a bustling little restaurant called Le Loup Blanc in Paris. The menu was plug-and-play – pick a meat, then fill out your plate with a selection of sides. Think upscale table-service cafeteria with crammed-quarters, French bistro charm and wine carafes clinking above a smoky din.

Quinoa was one of those side choices. And like many of us, I pronounced it incorrectly. But however I said it, I was glad I tried it. I was immediately hooked on those nutty little grains, and I ordered quinoa every time I ate there. Sometimes I made it the star of a meatless meal. Sometimes it nestled up to whatever meat I opted for.

Eventually, I moved home to the U.S., but quinoa came with me. I loved it because it was so versatile, so easy to cook and so good for me.

One cooked cup of this "pseudo-cereal" (it's actually the seed of a plant in the same family as spinach) offers 5 grams of fiber and 8 grams of protein, along with plenty of iron (a big plus for non-meat eaters) and B vitamins, but no saturated fat or cholesterol.

The exciting protein news on quinoa isn't necessarily the quantity (though that's good, too), but the quality. Quinoa offers all nine essential amino acids in the quantities required to make it a complete protein (unusual for vegetable-based protein sources). Another bonus: It's gluten-free, which makes it a great option for hosting gluten-free guests or for families (like mine) that have gluten-free members.

I like to cook up a batch of quinoa on the weekends, then use it during the week much as I would cooked rice - in cold salads, in hot side dishes like a stir-fry, or with stews and sauces. Sometimes I'll drizzle warm quinoa with maple syrup and top it with berries and almonds for a hearty breakfast.

My recipe for winter quinoa dressing is a perfect dish for both newbies and quinoa pros. It complements the gorgeous roasts of winter as a side dish, or can be served as a main event for a simple supper.

WINTER QUINOA DRESSING WITH APPLES AND DRIED CRANBERRIES

Start to finish: 30 minutes Servings: 6

- 1 1/4 cups uncooked quinoa
- 1 3/4 cups low-sodium broth (chicken or vegetable)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 sweet Italian turkey sausages, casings removed
- 2 small celery stalks (or 1 large), chopped (about 1 cup)



1/2 yellow onion, chopped (about 1 cup)
6 ounces fresh mushrooms, roughly chopped
1 apple, cored and diced
1/2 cup dried cranberries
1/4 cup pine nuts
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon minced fresh rosemary
2 teaspoons chopped fresh sage
Kosher salt and ground black pepper

In a large microwave-safe baking dish, combine the quinoa, broth and olive oil. Cover and microwave for 11 minutes, then allow to sit in the microwave for another 2 minutes. Remove the dish from the microwave and stir the quinoa. Depending on the power of your microwave, you may need to adjust the cooking time.

Meanwhile, in a large saute pan over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the sausage and cook, breaking up the meat with a spoon, until the meat is golden, about 7 minutes. Add the celery, onion and mushrooms, and cook until the vegetables are tender, another 7 minutes. Add the apple, cranberries, pine nuts, garlic, rosemary and sage, then cook an additional 2 minutes.

Combine the quinoa with the sausage and vegetable mixture and serve immediately.

Nutrition information per serving: 240 calories; 60 calories from fat (25 percent of total calories); 6 g fat (2.5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 15 mg cholesterol; 34 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 8 g sugar; 10 g protein; 570 mg sodium.