

Amaranth...

The Never Fading Flower



Amaranth is an 8,000 year old crop called the "super food" by the ancient Aztecs and the "never-fading flower" by the Greeks. Since 1975 amaranth has become famous & is being grown in many states in the U.S, but unfortunately isn't yet a regular food.

The plant is an annual herb, not a grain. There are approximately 60 species of amaranth. It has a colorful history, is highly nutritious, and the plant itself is extremely attractive & useful. The Columbian Aztecs believed it had supernatural powers & incorporated it into their religious ceremonies. During the Spanish conquest (1519), the grain was forbidden because it was associated with human sacrifice. Consequently, amaranth fell into obscurity for hundreds of years.

Amaranth is used in various cultures in some very interesting ways:

- In Mexico, it's popped & mixed with a sugar solution to make a confection called "alegria" (happiness). And milled & roasted amaranth seed is used to create a traditional Mexican drink called "atole."
- Peruvians use fermented amaranth seed to make "chicha" or beer.
- In the Cusco area the flowers are used to treat toothache & fevers.
- In India, amaranth is known as "rajeera" (the King's grain) and is popped then used in confections called "laddoos."



Amaranth is a bushy plant that grows 5 to 7 feet, with broad leaves & a showy flower head of small, red or magenta, clover like flowers. The Amaranth seeds are tiny (1/32"), lens shaped, of golden to creamy tan color, sprinkled with some sporadic dark seeds.

Benefits of Amaranth: Amaranth Seeds are

- Gluten-Free
- High in protein (15-18%)
- Contain lysine & methionine, two essential amino acids that are not frequently found in grains.
- High in fiber, calcium, iron, potassium, phosphorus, & vitamins A & C. The fiber content of amaranth is 3x that of wheat & its iron content is 5x that of wheat. It contains 2x more calcium than milk.
- Contain tocotrienols (a form of vitamin E) which have cholesterol-lowering activity in humans.
- Cooked amaranth is 90% digestible & because of this ease of digestion, it has traditionally been given to those recovering from an illness or ending a fasting period.
- Consist of 6-10% oil, which is found mostly within the germ. The oil is predominantly unsaturated & is high in linoleic acid, which is important in human nutrition.

Usage of Amaranth:

It can be cooked as a cereal, ground into flour, popped like popcorn, sprouted, or toasted. The seeds can be cooked with other whole grains, added to stir-fry or to soups & stews as a nutrient dense thickening agent. Amaranth flour is used in making pastas & baked goods. It should be mixed with other flours for baking yeast breads, as it contains no gluten.

To cook amaranth boil 1 cup seeds in 2-1/2 cups water until seeds are tender, about 18 to 20 minutes. Amaranth has a "sticky" texture so make sure not to overcook it as it can become "gummy." Amaranth flavor is mild, sweet, nutty, & malt like. The leaves of the amaranth plant taste much like spinach & are used in the same manner that spinach is used.

Today, research supports what the ancients already knew; Amaranth is a super-food packed with many benefits. It a great replacement to rice & potato-based products. So why not start incorporating Amaranth into your gluten-free, heart-healthy diet today!!!

Here is an easy recipe to start with:

Amaranth with Spinach & Tomato Mushroom Sauce

1 cup amaranth seed
2-1/2 cups water
1 Tablespoon olive oil
1 bunch spinach (or young amaranth leaves if available)
2 ripe tomatoes, skinned and coarsely chopped
1/2 pound mushrooms, sliced
1-1/2 teaspoons basil
1-1/2 teaspoons oregano
1 clove of garlic minced
1 Tablespoon onion, minced
Sea salt & pepper to taste

Add amaranth to boiling water, reduce heat, cover & simmer for 18-20 minutes. In parallel, stem & wash spinach, then simmer until tender. Dip tomatoes into boiling water to loosen skin, then peel & chop. Heat oil in a skillet over medium heat; add garlic & onions, and sauté for app. 2 minutes. Add tomato, mushrooms, basil, oregano, salt, pepper, & 1 Tablespoon water. Drain & chop spinach & add to tomato mixture. Cook for 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Lightly mash tomato as it's cooking. Stir the sauce into the amaranth or spoon it on top.

And Bon Appétit!!