



Chef Amber Balshaw is the owner of Preferred Sonoma Caterers, with over 20 years in her field. Executive Chef at her own PSC, a past Pastry Chef, and a valedictorian of the Culinary Institute of America. Amber is a true foodie, she loves food in all its forms and all aspects of culinary world. Please send your comments to Amber@SonomaCaterers.com and see more of her at Blog.SonomaCaterers.com.

I have spent over half of my life in the commercial kitchen, starting from the age of 16. I read, watch, talk and live food. American eating habits have changed greatly over the last 25 years. One that has become more and more prominent over the years is the re-introduction of whole grains to our diets. Even 15 years ago, whole wheat breads were the closest that many of us came to a whole grain. Now it seems whenever possible they are replacing white flour and adding nutrients even in everyday items.

But, what is a whole grain? An important question when one is specifically looking to amend the diet. According to the Whole Grain Council (yes, there is such a thing):

“Whole grains or foods made from them contain all the essential parts and naturally-occurring nutrients of the entire grain seed. If the grain has been processed (e.g., cracked,

crushed, rolled, extruded, and/or cooked), the food product should deliver approximately the same rich balance of nutrients that are found in the original grain seed.”

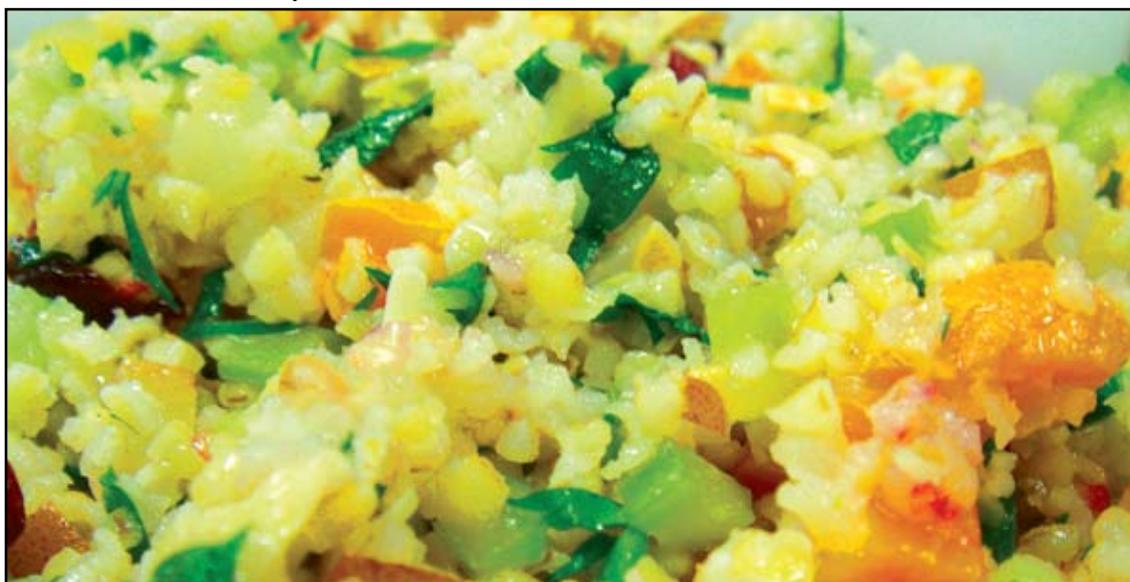
Now to get more of these in our daily diets.

Quinoa is one of my favorites. It is one of the world's oldest grains, having originated in the Andes with the Incas, and is the only plant product to contain all eight of the essential amino acids. It comes regularly in four colors -- red, purple, black and “natural” (all four are naturally occurring). A surprise here is that the natural color (light tan) is actually the most nutritious of the four (we typically expect colorful to mean nutritious). It has a small size, which means that it cooks rapidly, making it friendly to your weeknight dinner. Look for it in both the bulk food section and also near the rice in any grocery store. I love this Crimini Mushroom and Quinoa Pilaf; it is great as a side dish or used as a stuffing.

CHEF'S CORNER

The Daily Grain

by Amber Balshaw, Preferred Sonoma Caterers



Winter Fruit Tabbouleh

Crimini Mushroom & Quinoa Pilaf

Serves 2 to 4
2 Tbs Olive Oil
1 small Onion (diced)
1 cup Crimini Mushrooms (sliced)
1 cup Quinoa
2 cups Mushroom or Vegetable Stock

Sauté the mushrooms and onion in olive oil until wilted. Add quinoa and sauté for 2 to 3 minutes until warm and coated. Add the broth and bring to a full boil, then reduce to a simmer for 12 to 15 minutes. Fluff with a fork and serve.

I love to use Barley in pilafs and soups; it is a great addition. Aside from its use as food, barley is the root of the

English measurement system. In 1324, Edward II of England standardized the inch as equal to “three grains of barley, dry and round, placed end to end lengthwise.” The foot, the yard, the mile, and all other English measurements followed on. I think that is neat.

Mushroom Barley Soup

Serves 4 to 8
1 small Onion (diced)
2 lbs White or Crimini Mushrooms (sliced)
4 Tbs Olive Oil
1 tsp Dried Thyme
1 cup Carrot (diced)
1 cup Celery (diced)
6 cups Mushroom, Veg or Chicken Stock
¾ cup Barley
Salt and Pepper to taste

Sauté mushrooms and onions in the olive oil until wilted. Add the carrots and celery and sauté 5 more minutes. Add the chicken broth and barley, then bring to a boil and reduce to a simmer for approximately 45 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Cracked Bulgur is often used in Mediterranean cuisine. If you need a salad for a picnic but are unsure how cold you can keep it or you don't want to use mayonnaise, then try Tabbouleh; this wonderful salad is a blank slate for your personal tastes and ideas. We make it in any number

of different fashions, from dried fruit to Mexican flavors.

Tabbouleh

Serves 4 to 6
1 cup Bulgur
1½ cup Boiling Water
¼ cup Lemon Juice
¼ cup Olive Oil

This is the basic recipe to prepare the bulgur. Add bulgur to the boiling water, stir well, then cover and allow to sit for 1 hour. This step can also be done overnight. Toss with lemon juice and olive oil. Add your favorite ingredients.

Winter Fruit Tabbouleh

Tabbouleh from previous recipe
1 medium Apple or a firm Pear (diced)
¼ cup Dried Apricots (chopped)
¼ cup Craisins
¼ cup Celery (diced)
1 bunch Parsley (chopped)
¼ cup Toasted Almonds (chopped)
3 Tbs Honey

Add all ingredients to Tabbouleh, toss, then allow to rest 2 to 3 hours before serving.

Adding whole grains to your diet takes a bit of extra work and thought, but they are well worth it in flavor and health benefits.

Enjoy!



Preferred Sonoma Caterers
Located in mid-town Petaluma
Serving Sonoma County for 20 years

Petaluma's Caterer
Full Service & Casual Catering

From formal affairs with full rentals and staff to barbeques with a grill master to drop off picnics we are your caterer for all occasions.

Read more from our Chef Amber Balshaw in her column here in the Petaluma Post and on her blog Everything Culinary at blog.SonomaCaterers.com

Preferred Sonoma Caterers
416 East D Street
Petaluma CA 94952
707.769.7208
www.SonomaCaterers.com
blog.SonomaCaterers.com