

RECIPE for health

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Featured Food: ISRAELI COUSCOUS



By Peggy Crum, RD, Health4U Nutritionist

Israeli couscous (kūškūs) or ptitim (puh-TEE-tim) in Hebrew, is a tiny pasta invented in 1953 during the austerity period in Israel to fill in for the short supply of rice. Because its creation was a special request of Israel's first prime minister David Ben-Gurion, ptitim was dubbed "Ben-Gurion's rice." The rice-shaped noodle was an instant success. It wasn't long before the manufacturer added globe-shaped pasta to their repertoire, naming it "couscous."

"Couscous" was a bit of a misnomer for this new product. Although Israeli couscous and traditional North African couscous are both miniature wheat pastas, the similarities end there. The original couscous is made by rubbing durum semolina (high-protein wheat flour) and water into small course granules about the size of bread crumbs. The granules are so small and tender, they can be cooked in steam, a process that takes about 50 minutes. In our modern supermarket, pre-steamed, dried couscous is found as boxed mixes that require only a few minutes of steeping in hot water or broth to be ready to serve.

Israeli couscous, also known as "large" or "pearl," is extruded pasta made from bulgur (course chunks of wheat) then baked to give it a unique, nutty flavor. Each pearl is a few millimeters in size. While it is not precooked, it takes just a few minutes to be ready to eat thanks to its small size.

Three Ways to Prepare Israeli Couscous:

Pasta Salad-style: Add two cups of Israeli couscous to two quarts of lightly salted water; cook just until soft, about eight minutes, then drain and chill.

Pilaf-style: Toast two cups Israeli couscous in a small amount of oil until golden brown, then add two and a half cups water and a half teaspoon salt; cover and simmer for 15 minutes.

Risotto-style: see our featured recipe to the right.

With humble beginnings, Israeli couscous has been welcomed into the culinary world and today is considered a trendy and upscale addition to any menu.

Spinach and Artichoke Israeli Couscous

Recipe tested by Corporate Chef Kurt Kwiatkowski and featured in Residential Dining Services. Serves 8.

- 4 Tablespoons Olive Oil (divided)
- ½ cup Medium-diced Red Onion
- 2 cups Israeli Couscous
- 2½ cups Water
- 2 teaspoons Vegetable Base
- 9 ounces (8 packed cups) Fresh Baby Spinach
- 1 Tablespoon Minced Garlic
- 1 can (12 ounces) Artichoke Hearts (drained and quartered)
- 2 Tablespoons Diced Roasted Red Pepper
- 1½ Tablespoons Chopped Fresh Oregano
- Zest of ½ a Lemon
- Salt and Pepper to Taste

Heat two tablespoons of olive oil in a large sauce pan over medium heat. Add onion and sauté for four minutes. Add the couscous to the pan and sauté for an additional three minutes or until lightly toasted. Stir in water and vegetable base. Reduce heat to a simmer, cover and cook for eight to 10 minutes.

Heat the remaining olive oil in a sauté pan. Add spinach and garlic; sweat (cook in its own juices) until the spinach starts to wilt, then add the artichokes and red pepper. Cook for an additional two minutes. Remove from heat.

Lightly fluff the couscous with a fork. Add vegetable mixture, oregano and lemon zest to the couscous pan. Season with salt and pepper. Toss well and adjust seasoning to taste.

This recipe will be served at McDonel Dining, Akers Dining, Shaw Dining, The Gallery at Snyder/Phillips, Landon Dining, Brody Dining, Holden Dining and Case Dining on February 25.

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