

Spelt

There is always a hunt for new healthy foods and wonder ingredients. Spelt is a newly found food dating back from ancient times.

Spelt is an ancient grain variety and a close relative of modern wheat. It dates back to 2000 years B.C. It has to be milled in a similar way to barley, oats and rice because of its very tough husk. It's tough husk means it is less susceptible to pests and insects and usually allows growers to avoid using pesticides.

From a nutritional point of view, spelt is higher in protein (30% more), fat and fibre than modern wheat. It also contains special carbohydrates called mucopolysaccharides, which play a decisive role in stimulating the body's immune system, helping to increase its resistance to infection. There is also a role for mucopolysaccharides in blood clotting and helping to lower cholesterol, but this is less clear.

Oats and spelt have a similar micronutrient profile – being richer in most B vitamins, iron and zinc than wheat.

Spelt is said to have a more superior taste than modern wheat, being more nutty. There are also claims that individuals with certain 'allergies' to wheat bread can consume spelt. From the ancient healing texts of St.Hildegard to modern American studies, the special nutritional properties of spelt have always been considered beneficial. It is also believed that spelt is more easily digested. However, spelt still contains gluten and should not be consumed by people with coeliac disease

Spelt is common to the cuisine of Tuscany where it is known as farro. It is a versatile grain that can be used in casseroles, soups, cereals, and breads. Commercially, spelt is also processed into assorted pastas, hot and cold cereals, muffins, breads, and pancake mixes. Spelt is excellent breadmaking flour. Yeasted spelt bread doughs will rise, ripen and mature more quickly than ordinary doughs, making spelt especially good for quick and single rise breads as well as for double rise bread baking methods. Spelt flour cannot be used solely in bread machines because bread machines timing programmes have been carefully devised for use with conventional wheat flours. However, you can still enjoy spelt in your bread machine by blending it half and half with strong white bread flour.

Spelt is an alternative to wheat in bread, muesli and pasta. There are now several spelt products available in supermarkets such as Waitrose, delicatessens and health food shops.