

Arts & Entertainment

More Italian than tomatoes



Food for Thought
Arlene Kroeker

Farro. After glancing at the recipes, you may be wondering what the heck this stuff is.

Well, farro is so old it's new again. Referred to as the ancient grain with gourmet status, farro is indeed a grain, a 7,000-year old grain also known as emmer wheat (and to clarify, it is not spelt).

With a long and glorious history, true farro (*Triticum dicoccum*) is the original grain that fed the Mediterranean and Near Eastern populations for thousands of years. When the Romans conquered Egypt, kidnapped Cleopatra, and expropriated all things Egyptian, they also took the farro home with them. This high protein, slow release carbohydrate was the standard ration, along with silver and salt, of the Roman legions.

Ground into a paste and cooked, farro was the primary ingredient in *plus*, a polenta eaten for centuries by the Roman poor. Although called the grain of the poor, its high nutritional value meant the poor were healthier than the wealthier.

By the turn of the century in Italy, there were a few hundred acres of fields in the regions of Lazio, Umbria, the Marches and Tuscany. Farro would probably still be an extremely local specialty had the farmers not begun to supply it to elegant restaurants that used it in hearty veg-

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etable soups and other dishes.

A renewed interest in farro flourished among the gastronomes and health conscious alike, and thanks to the efforts of specialty food importer, Robert Giardino, can be found in Canada.

Giardino's research of all the aspects of farro and its versatility has set his product apart from others on the market. He has his own source, a farmer in Italy who left his job as an engineer in Rome to get back to the land and grow food, organically. Close to the Adriatic, he farms 50 hectares of farro, barley, chickpeas, and lentils. The farro Giardino sells is pure, not mixed with kamut or spelt.

Much like brown rice, farro can be used in whole

kernel form—pearled farro, cracked farro, and a soup mix. Made from the stone ground flour, the pasta forms include spaghetti, tagliatelle, pennete, ricciutelle, strozzapreti, and linguini. High in fibre, protein, magnesium, and vitamins A, B, C, and E, and low in gluten, farro is dark brown in colour, with a nutty taste and a chewy texture. Substitute farro for rice, pasta, and barley, in salads, soups, stews, and entrees.

Check his website, www.farro.ca for more information and a list of restaurants and markets that carry the product.

Giardino advises consumers to read the labels. Make sure you are getting the real thing—the 7,000-year old staff of life.

On July 9, from 1-3 p.m. Giardino will be demonstrating the many ways to use farro. Join him at Mercato nel Vicolo (Market in the Alley) behind Papi's Restaurant in Steveston.

On July 16, Giardino offers the Ursini line of olive oils for your tasting at Mercato. These citrus and herb-infused olive oils are imported from the Abruzzo region of Italy and produced by a third generation master oil guild member rated one of the top five in Europe.

Again at Mercato, on July 23, Giardino introduces Manicaretti, Ursini's line of bite-size appetizers made with the finest olive oil, freshest fruits and vegetables produced from the master's own fields.

Arlene Kroeker writes about food every Thursday in The Richmond Review.

Torta Salata Di Farro (Savoury)

- 4 cups cooked farro
 - 1 1/2 lb fresh ricotta, drained (place in a cheese cloth lined sieve over a bowl, overnight)
 - 3 eggs
 - 1/3 cup grated Parmigiano Reggiano
 - 2 tbsp chopped parsley
 - 1/4 tsp grated nutmeg
 - 1/2 tsp sea salt & pepper to taste
 - 9-inch springform pan, buttered, and coated with bread crumbs
- In a large mixing bowl, combine the farro with the ricotta, eggs, Parmigiano, parsley and nutmeg.

Season to taste with salt and pepper. Spoon the mixture into the prepared springform pan. Bake at 375°F for 40-50 minutes until golden on top and the filling is set.

Cool on a rack, remove from pan and serve warm or room temperature.

Pastiera Napoletana (Sweet)

- 2 cups cooked farro
- 1 lb whole milk ricotta
- 4 eggs
- 1/2 c sugar
- 1/2 tsp orange flower water
- 1/2 cup candied orange peel
- 1/4 tsp ground cinnamon

Pie dough for a 9" x 2" round cake or flan pan (bottom & lattice)

Beat the ricotta to soften it, then add the sugar. Beat in the eggs and the remaining filling ingredients. Add the cooked farro. Butter and line your pan with a 14" disk of dough. Pour in the filling and add the lattice pieces.

Overlap the edges of the dough over the lattice work so that it rests within the pan diameter. This will give some strength to the edges. Bake at 350°F for about 45 minutes or until the filling is set and the pastry is golden brown.

Farro & Peas

- 1 cup pearled farro
 - 3 cups vegetable broth
 - 1/2 cup green peas, fresh or frozen
 - 1/4 cup chopped parsley or cilantro
 - 1 clove garlic, crushed
 - 2 tbsp onions, chopped
 - 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
 - 1 pinch each salt & pepper
 - 1/4 cup grated cheese (optional)
- Saute the onions and garlic in the olive oil until translucent. Add farro and saute briefly. Add the broth and peas then bring to a boil.
- Reduce and simmer for about 25 minutes. Adjust the seasoning and serve.