

Cooking Light

[Battle of the Bulk Bins: A Cooking Guide for Whole Grains](#)

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By Sidney Fry

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So we've spent all this time telling you how to incorporate more whole grains into your diet: learning to decode labels, weeding through the falsely "enriched" flours, and deciphering stamps, claims, and tricky advertising. As we began to delve into the heart of whole grains here at the magazine, I found myself to be the go-to "yes/ no" informant of the grain world. Yes, this bag of popcorn is a whole grain. No, this box of cheesy (addictive and mighty delicious) wheat crackers is not. Complex as this can be, I came to one huge realization. When it came to many of the whole grains, I had no idea how to cook them! I could talk yes and no all day long, but when it came time to face that bulky bin of whole grains, I was clueless.



How many times have you walked past the bulk bins at your local health food store thinking, who in the world actually buys from that? My husband brews his own beer so he's bought the stuff. My routine is to bypass the bulk and walk straight to the rice aisle... buy the instant boil-in-bag brown rice, couscous, and oatmeal, give myself a pat on the back and head home. No sweat.

I never dreamed such diversity existed in the world of whole grains. Brown rice, oatmeal, popcorn, and anything made with whole-wheat pretty much dominated my whole grain spectrum.

As I began to discover this new world of ancient grains (how's that for an oxymoron) I realized that the word "instant" was completely foreign to most of these bulk-bin bites... along with instructions.

I did a little research, picking the brains of some professionals at the Whole Grains Council, as well as the Culinary Institute of America. If anyone knows about grains and how to cook them, it's these guys.

Here are a few tips from the experts:

- Don't always trust the box ratios of grain to liquid. You might find your grains swelling into an indistinguishable, gummy puff. I've included a chart below for guidance.
- Toast your grains. Not only does this give the grain a head start in cooking (less simmer time = more time to enjoy!) but more importantly, it brings out a wonderfully nutty, aromatic flavor in the grain. Heat up a nonstick skillet, toss in your grains, and let those nuggets toast for a minute or two (olive oil optional). If you are feeling really inventive... add some chopped shallots or garlic. After a few minutes, you'll start to smell that nutty aroma. Add your liquid and simmer away.
- Need a shortcut? Soak your grains. A little presoak (a few hours or so) will tenderize the grain, and give them a head start for cooking.
- Cook whole grains in batches. Grains keep 3-4 days in your fridge and warm up beautifully. They work well in everything: Soups, salads, burgers... even pancakes!

Grain Cooking Chart

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|---------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--------------|
| Amaranth | 1 cup of grain to 1 ½ cups water | Simmer 20-25 minutes | 2 cups |
| Barley, hulled or pearled | 1 cup of grain to 2 ½ cups water | Simmer 45-50 minutes until tender | 3 ½ - 4 cups |
| Bulgur | 1 cups of grain to 2 cups water | Simmer 10-15 minutes | 3 cups |
| Couscous, whole wheat | 1 cup of grain to 2 cups water | Bring to boil. Remove from heat and list sit 10 minutes (heat off) | 3 cups |
| Farro | 1 cup of grain to 2 ½ cups water | Simmer 45 minutes until tender | 3 cups |
| Millet, hulled | 1 cup of grain to 2 cups water | Simmer 15-20 minutes until fluffy | 4 cups |
| Oats, Steel Cut | 1 cup of grain to 3 cups water | Simmer 20 minutes | 4 cups |
| Quinoa | 1 cup of grain to 1 cup of water | Simmer 20 minutes | 2 cups |
| Rice, brown | 1 cup of grain to 2 ½ cups water | Simmer 35-45 minutes (depending on variety) | 3 ½ cups |
| Wheat berries | 1 cup of grain to 2 ½ cups | Simmer 45 minutes (shorter | 3 cups |

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| | water | for soft wheat berries) | |
| Wild Rice | 1 cup of grain to 2 ½ cups water | Simmer 60 minutes until tender | 3-4 cups |

One thing is for sure: Those bulk bins hold a health food gold mine that's not just good for you, but delicious too. Grab your guide and get cooking. You've got a whole new world to explore.