

Lesson 3: Whole Grains

Lesson 3 covers whole grains and their prominence in African heritage cooking. Grains and starchy tubers are the underpinnings of most African cuisines, acting as a bed for savory soups and stews. In traditional times, all grains were whole grains, naturally adding to the nutrition to every plate. A tradition worth reviving!

We highlight 11 different whole grains with African diasporan origins in Lesson 3. Most students are very impressed to learn that so many whole grains that we know come from Africa, and it's this connection between nutrition and culture that encourages students to choose whole grains over refined grains going forward.

Oldways Tip #1: Invite Your Students To Bring In Homework Dishes From Home.

Traditional cuisines throughout the African diaspora use milder tasting grains as the base for vegetables, beans, seafood and meat doused in savory flavors—like marinades, sauces, tomato and peanut based soups. Invite volunteer students to bring in their homework assignments from weeks 1 and 2 to compliment this week's grain dishes. Suggest Lesson 1's Spicy Chickpeas dish or Lesson 2's Mess of Greens with Mojo Sauce. Explain to students that they can make each of the grain dishes plain, without anything in them, as bases at home. In the lesson, we show students how they can infuse grains with vegetables, herbs, and spices, when they have more cook time for even more nutrition and flavor.

Oldways Tip #2: Ingredient Access. Depending on where you live, you may have trouble finding one or more of the whole grain items. Millet and quinoa may be hard to find, especially in more rural areas or neighborhoods underserved by grocery stores. This offers an opportunity to talk about the food injustice that currently exists in our country and how going back to the “old ways” can be a solution. If you can't find one or more of the whole grains listed in the recipes, we have provided alternative recipes below and in the Oldways recipe search engine.

Oldways Tip #3: Bring in Examples Of Whole Grains And Products With The Whole Grain Stamp On Their Packaging.

If you have access to a grocery store with a bulk section, purchase a small amount of any of the whole grains featured in Lesson 3 to show your students. You can also purchase one or two products that have the Whole Grain Stamp on them (breads, granola bars, oatmeal, pasta, etc.) to show students what the Stamp looks like on packaging. Ideally, choose a grocery store closest to where your class is held – that way your students will most easily be able to visit it, before or after class.

Oldways is the parent organization to the Whole Grains Council, which helps the public find whole grain foods and understand their health benefits. Be sure to share the Whole Grains Council website with your students: wholegrainscouncil.org (found in the curriculum and on the Whole Grains 101 brochure).

Tips and Comments from Fellow Teachers

- I purchased less than an ounce of 20 different grains to display for the class. The grains came from our local Co-op – I'm sure I could have obtained them for free if I contacted them ahead of time.
- The easiest part to teach was “What are Whole Grains?” section. Everyone wanted to sample the unfamiliar grains and learn how to cook them.
- Students loved these one-pot meals!
- In addition to the class recipes, I displayed samples of: sorghum, hulled and pearl barley; an oats exhibit of oats—steel cut oats, old fashioned oats, and quick and instant oats; and a bread exhibit of oatmeal bread, rye, and teff bread (Injera).
- Handout #3 from this lesson is probably one of the most valuable handouts of the student handbook, in my opinion. It helps take the lesson from theory to practical application and insures that students will return to the book as a reference.
- People were interested to learn about new grains: millet and couscous especially. Introducing new foods to people is exciting!

Additional Recipes

[Oldways Quinoa with Wilted Greens and Avocado](#)

[Sorghum Salad](#)

[Oldways Accara](#) (aka Akara) with [Kanni](#) sauce