

YUMMY NORTHWEST

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Get the most with oats

Oats are perhaps the only food that has never gotten a bad rap from nutritionists. And every day, it seems, a new study proves something even better about them.

It's easy to get plenty of nutritious goodness all day from this wonderful grain: granola for breakfast, oatmeal cookies for snacks, oatmeal bread for sandwiches, oats cooked in a savory broth for dinner.

You just can't go wrong eating oats.

From weeds to bread

Oats first grew as weeds in wheat and barley fields, probably making their initial appearance in the Fertile Crescent of the ancient Middle East.

Perhaps hard-working farmers abhorred the waste because eventually these persistent grains became a crop in their own right. Now the United States is the third leading producer of oats in the world.

Whoever decided to start eating oats had the right idea. Overall, they rank higher than other grains in nutrition and are one of those rare versatile foods that go with everything else, from sweet to savory to spiced and back again.

While oats have plenty of vitamins and minerals, their best recommendation is fiber. Oats, particularly oat bran, have lots of soluble fiber that helps steady insulin flow, a boon to diabetics and anyone struggling with low blood sugar.

People all over the world eat oats in various forms, but the people of Scotland



Oats in America

1856 – The first mill for making oatmeal was opened in Ohio, and Americans began eating it for breakfast. Before this, oats were fed only to horses.

1863 – Dr. James Caleb Jackson created Granula (trademarked), the first American cold breakfast cereal. This dense, baked formula had to be soaked overnight. Granola was a competing cereal brand.

1900 – Dr. Maximilian Bircher-Benner developed muesli as part of his treatment in a Swiss hospital. The original muesli comprised rolled oats, raw apple, lemon juice, hazelnuts, and milk: the perfect meal, according to the doctor. A few health-conscious Americans ate this new dish with gusto.

1960s – Granola, no longer a trademarked name as it had been in the late 1800s, became popular as part of the trend toward healthful eating.

excel at finding uses for them. Foods like porridge (stirred with a specially designed stick called a spurtle), oatcakes (cooked on a griddle), haggis, and Scotch broth all contain healthful oats. Elizabeth David, in her book, "English Bread and Yeast Cookery," provides a fascinating look into the culinary history of oats in Great Britain.

Oat flour contains minimal gluten, making it necessary to combine them with wheat flour for breadmaking. But oats add a nice sweetness to breads and are worth experimenting with.

Any way you eat them, oats are cool! (or warm...or hot...)

Try it, you'll like it

Here are some ideas for getting your daily oats.

Beverage

Find out how simple oat milk is to make by going online to www.godairyfree.org (click on "Dairy Substitutes"). You'll also find information there about how to buy oat milk ready-made under the Pacific brand name.

Quick oatmeal

For one serving of oatmeal before you rush out the door in the morning, boil two-thirds cup water. Pour this over one-third cup rolled oats in a heatproof bowl, cover, and let sit for five minutes.

Sprouts

Soak groats overnight in warm water and then strain and place in a jar in a dark place. Rinse daily with warm water until tender, nutritious sprouts appear, about 5 days.

Anything

Add a small handful of oats to soups, casseroles, stir-fries, pancake batter, homemade bread, smoothies, chili . . . gee, you name it.

Pretty as a picture

It's worth ordering oatmeal and granola when you eat out just to see the creative ways it's served. Here are two places in Seattle that allowed the **Yummy Northwest** camera to record the beauty of the moment.



B&O Espresso

204 Belmont E.
Seattle, Wash.
(206) 322-5028

Oatmeal is made porridge-style, accompanied by delectable dried apricots, toasted pecans, golden raisins, brown sugar, and half-and-half.

B&O granola contains, among other mouthwatering things, golden raisins, coconut, walnuts, sunflowers seeds, and sesame seeds.



Library Café

850 N.W. 85th Street
Seattle, Wash.
(206) 789-5682

Called the Golden Bowl, this granola creation will delight and amaze and is guaranteed to give you a full week's worth of fruit. It is served in a large goblet with vanilla yogurt, but you can ask for it plain to top with milk. The day **Yummy Northwest** tasters ate here, the fruit toppings included generous slices of pears, apples, bananas, strawberries, and pineapple.

Ready-made oats

There's a granola and oatmeal recipe for every taste. The best way to get what you like is to make it yourself. But if you haven't got time, there are several companies that put it on grocery shelves for your convenience. Here a few local ones.

Chuck and James

Sidney, Mont.
www.chuckandjames.com

This unique "soft and chewy" granola is made by a small company in the northeast corner of Montana. You'll enjoy looking through their Web site; when you're done chuckling, order some granola.

Mountain Madness

Seattle, Wash.
www.mountainmadnessnaturals.com

The package calls this "premium granola," and they aren't kidding. They're doing something right because it makes for darned good eating. Available in many Northwest supermarkets; check the Web site to find one near you.

Cream of the West

Harlowton, Mont.
www.creamofthewest.com

This hot cereal contains eight Montana-grown grains (and nothing else), but oats add the sweet flavor.

Which oats are best for you?

You'll see several kinds of oats sold in the store. Here is a quick guide to what's what. For photos and another take on this information, visit Karen's Kitchen at www.karenskitchen.com/a/recipe_oat.htm.

Groats – Whole oat seeds are cleaned and hulled to become groats.

Steel-cut – Groats are cut into pieces to become what are also known as Irish oats (popular in Ireland and Scotland). These take longer to cook than rolled oats and become a kind of porridge when simmered.

Rolled – Also known as old-fashioned oats and oat flakes, these are groats that have been steamed and pressed.

Quick – Steel-cut oats are steamed and pressed. They can be substituted for rolled oats in baking.

Instant – Steel-cut oats are cooked and dried to create quick-cooking oatmeal, but they are not good for baking.

Oat bran – Also called oat germ, this is the wholesome outer layer of fiber that was stripped from the groats.

Oat flour – You can sometimes buy this in stores, but it is easily made by putting rolled or quick oats into a blender and grinding to flour consistency. (Bob's Red Mill sells oat flour and groats: www.bobsredmill.com.)

Did you know . . .

Gruel is oatmeal that is mixed with cold water, then strained and heated to be fed to babies and others who need some extra nourishment.



About Yummy Northwest

Each monthly issue highlights an edible delight available in the Pacific Northwest.

Contact the editor

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