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Published March 18th, 2009

## Natural Food

By Susie Iventosch



Open Sesame Natural Foods in Lafayette Photo Susie Iventosch

About 15 years ago, a good friend of mine served a mixed-grain mushroom pilaf to us at a dinner gathering. She'd found it in a 1990-something Martha Stewart Living magazine and saved it in her recipe file. It was absolutely delicious and every once in a while, I come upon the recipe (now in my file) and remember to serve it again. Since I've been on a flax kick lately, I decided to change it up a little using an even wider variety of grains than the original recipe called for, plus the addition of porcini, otherwise known as God's gift to humanity!

I started looking for other interesting and healthy grains to add to the flax seeds I'd purchased earlier at Open Sesame Natural Foods in Lafayette. One of my favorite pastimes, perusing market shelves to see what's new and interesting, produced a new item I'd not heard of before - purple prairie barley. Naturally, I bought it and took it home.

Some time passed before trying the new purple barley and by then I'd already forgotten where I'd bought it in the first place. So, I phoned Timeless Seeds, the grower of this particular grain, and the CEO, David Oien, answered the phone. Chief among my questions was where I could possibly buy it again. He helped me out and also offered some very good information about this kind of barley. And, as a result, Open Sesame now carries this majestic wonder grain.

"We re-introduced this hullless heirloom grain about six or eight years ago," he said. "Hullless barley originated in the Nile River Valley and the purple hullless barley can be traced back for at least many centuries to the mountainous areas of Tibet, as well. Barley is an adaptive crop and can grow in both high heat and cool mountainous regions. It's been our observation that the purple pigmentation occurs due to fertile soil and adequate levels of rainfall."

The purple color, he says, is caused by anthocyanins, water soluble vacuolar pigments that serve as antioxidants, like those found in blueberries, purple cabbage and beets. Purple barley is 15 percent protein and is the highest source he's seen for healthful, cholesterol-fighting beta glucans, immune response potentiators known to promote health in a number of ways.

He went on to inform me that pearl barley has an indigestible husk that must be removed before human consumption, and in the process many of the nutrients are lost. Flax seeds also promote good health, and according to Sue Jun, owner of Open Sesame, flax is good for fiber and is an excellent source of Omega 3-6-9 essential fatty acids, which can help to reduce cholesterol and inflammation, and fight heart disease.

After all that searching, and researching, Martha's good old mixed-grain pilaf evolved into a regular health-nut dish. The purple barley gives a rich earthy flavor, and when combined with flax seeds, wild rice, wheat berries, onions and porcini, it is good enough for a main course!

And, if you felt like adding toasted pecans before serving that would be very tasty too.

Open Sesame has served the Lamorinda area for 30 years and carries a wide variety of grains, including the purple prairie barley, many gluten-free products and several cookbooks containing wonderful, healthy recipes.

Open Sesame Natural Foods

983 Moraga Road, Lafayette, CA. 925.283.2207

Open Monday thru Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Sources for nutritional information:

<http://www.timelessfood.com/purple-prairie-barley.html>

[http://www.foodproductdesign.com/articles/463/463\\_651nutrinotes.html](http://www.foodproductdesign.com/articles/463/463_651nutrinotes.html)

<http://www.mind1st.co.uk/omega-3-6-9.asp>

<http://www.healingdaily.com/detoxification-diet/flaxseed.htm>

<http://www.umm.edu/altmed/articles/omega-3-000316.htm>



Five grains used in this dish: from center front left clockwise: pearl barley, wild rice, brown rice, dried porcini and cremini mushrooms, purple prairie barley, flax. Pilaf in center Photo Susie Iventosch

#### Mixed-Grain Pilaf with Porcini mushrooms

##### Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 ½ cups cremini or brown mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 4 ounces dried porcini, reconstituted (use fresh if available) and chopped
- ¼ cup flax seed
- ¼ cup soft winter wheat berries
- ¼ cup pearl barley
- ½ cup brown rice
- ½ cup purple prairie barley (or pearl barley if purple is not available)
- ½ cup wild rice
- 4½ cups chicken broth
- Salt and pepper to taste

##### Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

On the stovetop, melt the butter in a large oven-proof pot (with a tight-fitting lid) over low heat. Add oil, garlic and onion and sauté until translucent. Add mushrooms and increase heat to medium-high. Cook until mushrooms are soft and both onions and mushrooms begin to brown slightly. Add all of the grains, and stir well to coat them with the oil and onion-mushroom mixture. (You may need to add one more tablespoon olive oil at this point.) Cook over medium-high heat, stirring often for about five minutes. Add the chicken stock to the pot and bring to a boil. Remove pot from stove, cover immediately, and bake in oven for about 1 hour or until grains are cooked, but al dente. Season with fresh ground sea salt and ground pepper.

You can substitute these grains with your favorites, or something new you happen to find on a market shelf, but keep the total quantity of grains the same – 2¼ cups. Also, toasted pecans and/or freshly grated Parmesan cheese are both nice additions to this dish.

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