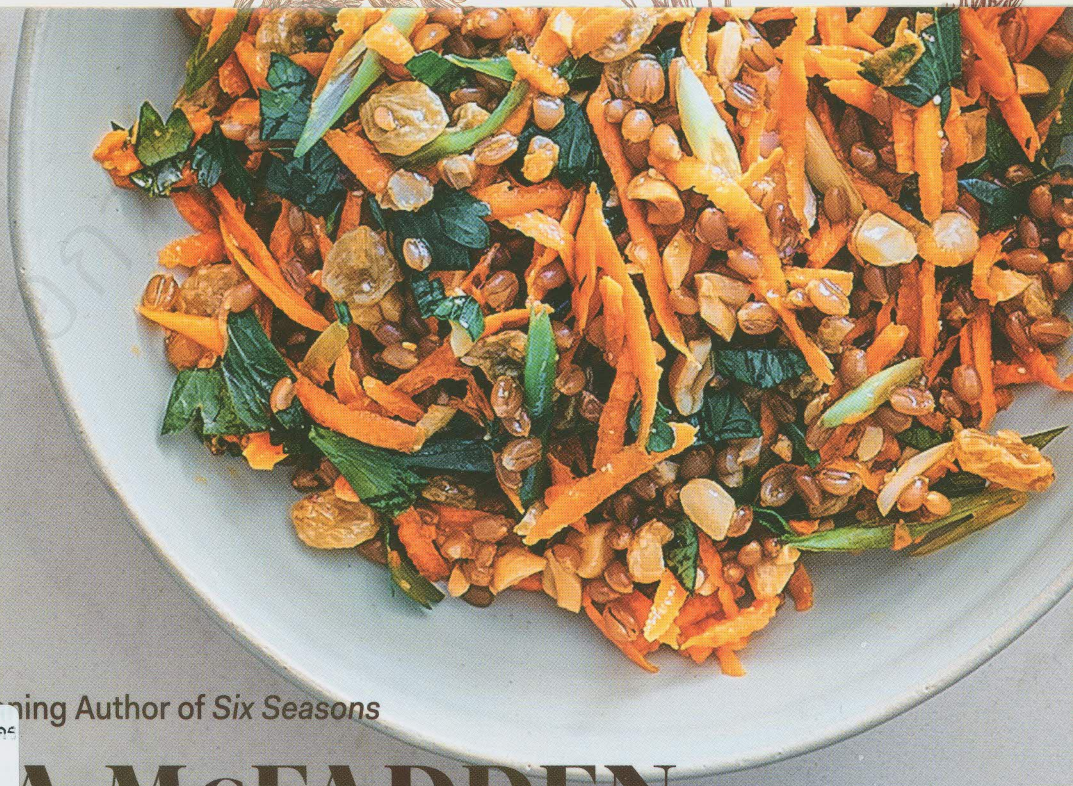
Grains for Every Season

RETHINKING OUR WAY WITH GRAINS

With Recipes Including Barley, Brown Rice, Millet, Quinoa, Farro, Freekeh, and More



James Beard Award–Winning Author of *Six Seasons*

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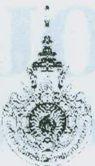
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introduction

Why I'm Excited about Cooking with Whole Grains and Hope You Are, Too

Like many good things in life, my appreciation of whole grains began in Italy. Farro was my first love. I was introduced to it when I cooked at the American Academy in Rome, a project started by Alice Waters. We would feature farro on our menus in a variety of ways, but especially as farrotto: toasted in oil and butter with aromatic vegetables and herbs, then slowly stirred with just enough broth to plump up the grains. In other words, risotto . . . but better. Chewier, denser texture, deeper flavor, starchy enough to be creamy but not mushy. I loved it.

Since those days in Rome, I have evolved into an eager whole-grain cook. As I write this book, I own three restaurants in Portland, Oregon—my flagship Italian restaurant Ava Gene's, its next-door-neighbor pizza place Cicoria, and Tusk, which features Middle Eastern flavors. I now incorporate not only farro into the dishes I cook at work and at home, but also its wheat-family cousins—spelt, freekeh, bulgur, wheat berries—along with other whole grains like barley, buckwheat, millet, quinoa, and more.

I wrote this cookbook because I want you to love whole grains as much as I do, and I want you to realize that it doesn't take a lot of effort to incorporate them into your cooking life. Even if you're not yet familiar with whole grains, you likely already crave their flavors and textures—nutty, toasty, chewy, all easy to love.

The world of grains is vast, and in this book I'm not attempting to be encyclopedic, just useful and inspirational, so I've limited the information and recipes to the grains that I cook with the most frequently . . . which is a lot! And for any whole grains that I didn't include, for example, amaranth or sorghum, it's only because I haven't yet had the pleasure of getting to know them well enough.

I've organized the book into chapters by individual grain, arranged in alphabetical order from barley to wild rice. In each section, you'll find recipes that use the grain itself and sometimes recipes using flour milled from that grain as well. So unlike some cookbooks, in which appetizers are at the front and desserts are at the back, this book distributes all types of dishes throughout the chapters. If you'd like to see a complete list of the recipes by their role in a meal, however, check out the list on page 347. Throughout the book, you'll find special foldout features showing you how to create some of the easiest seasonal meals using whole grains: grain bowls, stir-fries, pilafs, and pizzas. These special sections share additional recipes, teach you how to assemble the dishes, and give you six seasonal ingredient combinations to get you on your way to deliciousness.

The first pages of the book cover basic techniques for whole grains and flours, from storing to cooking to ideas for keeping prepared grains handy in your fridge or freezer, ready to transform into a meal in minutes. I also give detailed cooking instructions in each recipe, so no need to flip back and forth, but I'm hoping the basics section will be a useful reference for cooking beyond the covers of this book.

My recipes feature whole grains as you would expect, in salads and grain bowls, but also in unexpected ways—buckwheat in place of ground pork in a Thai-influenced larb-style salad (see Buckwheat, Lime, and Herb Salad, Larb Style, page 75), quinoa as a crunchy pop in tempura-style batter for fried veggies, and millet for more texture in a buttery, crumbly streusel topping on Roasted Butternut Squash Maple Millet Bread (page 122).

The recipes in this book also span the seasons. While the grains themselves are appropriate any time of year, the recipes run the range from bright and refreshing to cozy and comforting. Quinoa and Watermelon Salad with Pistachios and Spicy Pickled Peppers (page 147) is a perfect midsummer dinner on the deck (don't forget the pink wine), while Quinoa and Chicken Soup with French Lentils and Herbs (page 151) will warm you after a chilly afternoon of raking autumn leaves, or just an afternoon on the couch with a book and a blanket.

Flavor First, but Dang, Whole Grains Are Nutritious

I am driven by flavor in everything I do, so I use whole grains and whole-grain flours in my recipes first and foremost because they are delicious.

But the fact that whole grains are incredibly nutritious is a huge bonus. Most people know that whole-grain foods contain more fiber because they include the bran, which is of course important in our diets, but grains are so much more than bran delivery vehicles. They contain significant amounts of vitamins and minerals and good things like antioxidants and other phytochemicals, about which science is learning more and liking more. I've outlined the key nutrients for each grain in the profile at the beginning of each section, so take a look. I also indicate which grains are gluten-free.

You Already Know How to Cook with Whole Grains

The cooking techniques you'll use in grain dishes are simple—you'll basically just cook the grains in a liquid until they are plump and tender. The details make the difference: whether you toast first, add aromatics such as garlic and rosemary, or cook in water, broth, or even luxurious coconut milk, as in Millet Morning Porridge with Coconut Milk and Quick Mango "Jam" (page 117).

You can't mess them up; most whole grains are highly adaptable. Their mild flavors partner happily with pretty much any ingredient, as is plainly shown by the fact that in one chapter I've got a recipe for farro with squid and another for a brown-butter honey cake made with farro flour. That's range! Whole grains can play a

center-of-the-plate role, as in Shrimp Fried Freekeh with Spring Vegetables (page 213), because they are nicely filling and substantial. Or they can be a smaller player, just bringing a special textural note perhaps, as in the barley that gives body to Super Grain and Veggie Burgers (page 43). Just about every recipe in this book calls for kosher salt, but please note that not all kosher salts are the same. We used Diamond Crystal brand (in the red box, widely available at many grocery stores), which has less salt per tablespoon than most other brands, so if you use a different brand, you'll want to adjust the quantities a bit. Learn more on page 324.

A Little "Refinement" Is Okay

You'll notice that many of the baked goods and pastas use whole-grain flour but also incorporate some white flour, mostly unbleached all-purpose but also tipo "00" (a finely milled Italian flour perfect for pasta) and white bread flour. White flour comes from wheat that has been refined—the bran and germ polished off, leaving just the starchy endosperm. White flour can be used to create wonderful things, but it doesn't offer much nutrition, and of course it has a much more neutral flavor than flours from whole grains.

I add white flour in many of these recipes nonetheless, because 100 percent whole-grain flour can be tricky for the uninitiated, especially when making food that needs a specific texture. The main challenge comes from gluten (a combination of two proteins, glutenin and gliadin), which is the substance that makes bread crusty on the outside and tender on the inside, produces the satisfying crunch of a cracker, gives pasta its seductive chewy texture . . . all the good things. (No, I'm not talking about whether gluten is good for your health; that's a different discussion.) But some whole-grain flours (such as buckwheat flour) don't contain any gluten, so it's difficult to create the structure that will allow bread to rise and pizza to stretch and tagliatelle to bounce. Other whole-grain flours, such as your basic whole wheat, contain gluten but also bran and germ, which change the texture and provide challenges as well.

Many cooks create excellent baked goods with 100 percent whole-grain flours. At my restaurants, for example, we use 100 percent whole wheat flour for our pastas. But good results come with experience and experimentation. For the purposes of this book, and for much of the food that I cook and serve at my restaurants, I use whatever combination of whole-grain and white flour gives me the best flavor and texture.

As you become more familiar with the recipes in this book, you should feel free to experiment with the ratios of whole-grain to white flour and nudge things closer to all whole-grain, if you like.

Help Nurture the Local Grain Economy

No matter what grain or flour you're using, what's most important is that it be good. Good as in sustainably grown, carefully harvested, milled with craft and care, and freshly cooked up into something delicious as soon as possible.

There's a whole-grain revolution taking place in this country, and if you haven't yet noticed it, you will soon, as grain farmers move away from the commodity model, in which the priorities are a high yield per acre and selling on the global market.

Much like the farm-to-table movement that has blossomed over the last few decades, grain farmers are trying to keep things local, too, selling to local businesses and directly to consumers through farmers' markets and online outlets. These passionate farmers are making planting choices with a lot more in mind than just the price of wheat on the Chicago Board of Trade exchange this season.

Along with looking for ways to preserve and nourish their soils, this new breed of grain farmer keeps the end user in mind, learning what bakers, chefs, and consumers want to cook. They are discovering heritage varieties—sometimes called "landrace" grains—that are way more delicious and full of character than a mass-market grain, and often more nutritious.

But producing amazing food like this is hard work! We need to support the farmers who are devoting their lives to our culinary happiness, so I encourage you to explore your own local grain economy. Look for vendors at your farmers' market. Ask your favorite bakeries where their flours come from. Many of these producers will ship their products, if you can't find anyone in your own community. Farm-to-table grains can become as common as locally grown peaches and tomatoes if we, as consumers, will support the effort.

I've created a list of producers that I use and admire (see page 332), to serve as a resource for you and to give them a shout-out.

My Ongoing Whole-Grain Journey

I'd like to acknowledge some individuals who have been along with me on my whole-grain adventure ride over the past few years. They have fueled my excitement for whole grains, taught me so much, and helped me push the boundaries with whole grains and whole-grain flours. JoMarie Pitino changed the entire pasta program at Ava Gene's, and it was fun to be a part of that passion. Nora Mace has always found a perfect balance of whole-grain flours in pastries, baked goods, and bread at Tusk and Ava Gene's. Nora helped with several of the recipes in this book and supported the idea throughout development. Daniel Green, with whom I worked at Cicoria and Ava Gene's, also has a positive obsession with whole grains and whole-grain flours. Our pizza at Cicoria and several recipes in this book would not exist if not for him.

In addition to hanging out with interesting food people, one of the privileges of being a restaurant chef is having access to innovations in farming. I get to taste new—or more likely old, as in heirloom—vegetables that a farmer may be experimenting with this season, and I can play with them in my own kitchen and then see how my customers like them. Sometimes I even visit these passionate growers at their farms, where I can stand among the crops growing in the fields. In the past, that usually meant rows of gorgeous emerald kale or rainbow-colored chard, or even groves of elegant olive trees at Albert Katz's olive oil operation in California (see Sources, page 332). But now, in addition to vegetables, I'm seeing those proverbial amber waves of grain in my local farm region, and I'm finding local grain products not just from my restaurant vendors but at grocery stores, too. The world is rediscovering whole-grain cooking, looking to the past and around the world for interesting varieties, updating those traditions with the exciting flavors and dishes that we love to eat nowadays. I find it all inspiring, which is why I've shared it with you in this book. I hope it provides plenty of delicious inspiration to launch you on your own whole-grain adventure.

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What *Is* a Grain, Anyway?

A whole grain is one of nature's many ingenious creations: compact, sturdy, self-sufficient, and—fortunately for us animals—delicious and nutritious.

The word "grain" is often defined as a seed from a cereal crop . . . and a cereal is one of several types of grasses that are cultivated by humans in order to get those seeds. (Here's a fun fact: The word "cereal" comes from Ceres, the Roman goddess of the harvest. She's so pretty! And nice! No lightning bolts or punishments, just abundance. Her Greek name is Demeter, which is the name of one of the main certifying bodies for biodynamic agriculture.)

True cereal grains are members of the Poaceae botanical family and include barley, corn, millet, oats, rice, rye, sorghum, and wheat. Within each of those are subvarieties, especially within the wheat family, which includes einkorn, farro (also called emmer), freekeh, Kamut, and spelt.

But there are also things called pseudo-grains, which include amaranth, buckwheat, and—the biggie these days—quinoa. These pseudo-grains belong to different botanical families, but for our purposes of being wholesome and delicious, we will consider them grains. And don't forget wild rice! Not in the same family as rice, and with the wonderful Latin name *Zizania aquatica* (among a few others). All this to say that the world of whole grains is wide and has grown even wider in recent years, as growers and eaters rediscover ancient grain varieties.

In this book, I'm not taking a comprehensive approach; I'm including recipes for the grains that I think are the most versatile (and delicious) in the kitchen, which means you won't see a teff or sorghum recipe. But that doesn't mean you couldn't use those or other grains in some of my recipes. My goal is to get you as a home cook so comfortable with and excited by whole grains that you learn to incorporate them into all kinds of daily cooking, from a breakfast muesli to fresh seasonal salads for lunch to a chicken and grain dish for dinner to a pan of brownies to take to a school event.

In order to understand both the nutritional benefits and cooking challenges of whole grains, it's helpful to look at a single grain. The specific components and quantities of vitamins and minerals, fiber, and other compounds vary among grains, but all grains have the same structure.

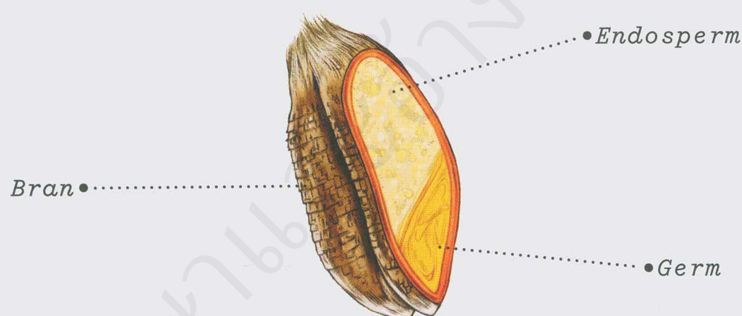
What's not pictured here is the **hull**, the tough outer coating that protects the grain when it's out in the fields living a plant's life. The hull isn't edible and needs to be removed, either during harvesting or by some sort of abrasion process after harvest. This is where we get to bring in the old-timey terms "threshing" and "winnowing."

Threshing is where the grains are whomped somehow to crack and loosen the hulls. Winnowing is the process that blows away the loosened hulls (now known as the chaff), leaving just the edible grain behind. Some grains are bred to have hulls that are light and papery, and that loosen and fall off easily, so no actual threshing is required. These are (rather poetically) called "naked" grains. Others have hulls that cling to the grain and need more convincing before releasing; these are "covered" grains.

The **bran** layer envelops the entire grain and provides protection for the grain, and lots of healthy fiber, plus some B vitamins and antioxidants, for us.

The **endosperm** is the largest part of the grain, and it's the energy source for the grain, were it to grow into an actual plant. The endosperm contains some proteins, vitamins, and minerals, but it's mostly carbohydrates—starch.

The **germ** is essentially the embryo of the plant (think of the word "germinate"), the part that would grow into another plant, being fed by the endosperm. The germ contains proteins, B vitamins, minerals, and healthy fats. These fats, however, are what can cause a whole grain to go rancid easily, so they are a benefit but one that must be managed.



When all these components are intact, that grain is a "whole" grain. When any of them are removed, the grain becomes "refined," which isn't always a terrible thing, but any sort of refinement does impact the nutritional value of the grain, along with its flavor and cooking characteristics.

One way a grain gets refined is by removing all or part of the bran. Some varieties of grains, such as barley and farro, have hard hulls that need heavy abrasion to remove them, and unfortunately that action can remove some of the bran as well. This brings us to the terminology related to hulls, which needs some sorting out: The term "hulled" means the hulls have been removed by a process that leaves all of the bran, and "hulless" means the grain was grown with a hull that falls off easily. (Could we come up with better terms? This reminds me of the "boned" vs. "boneless" chicken dilemma.)

"Pearled" means the bran has been polished off; "semipearled" means some bran is left intact. A pearled grain therefore contains fewer nutrients but takes less time to cook and will cook up a bit more tender and fluffy than one with the bran intact.

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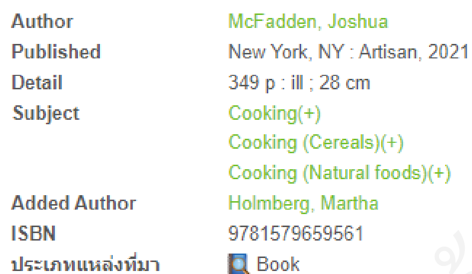

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