



Using whole grains to gussy up that old three-bean salad

By Katie Workman

In certain parts of the country, a good three-bean salad is almost always the anchor to a potluck or picnic, the kinds of gatherings where sturdy, crowd-pleasing, portable - and frankly inexpensive - food is wanted.

There have been countless variations of three-bean salads made with nothing more complex than the beans and bottled vinaigrette. And they've most certainly been well received. But after a while those salads can start to feel heavy and monotonous. I was after something with a fresher feel.

In this version, the addition of spelt and canned hearts of palm adds tons of interest. A generous amount of fresh herbs provides brightness. Spelt is a whole grain that been around since ancient times, but now it is only commonly grown in Europe. It fell out of favor in the early 1900s, but now that whole grains are back in the spotlight, it's becoming popular again. It's quite chewy and nutty, with large, fat rice-shaped grains.

Some people who have wheat intolerances can enjoy spelt, but it is a mem-

ber of the wheat family, so it's not suitable for people who are celiac or have more serious wheat aversions. It usually is soaked for several hours before cooking, which reduces the cooking time.

When you are cooking the spelt for this recipe, consider making extra. It's nice to have later in the week for tossing into pilafs, soups and stews. Soak 1 cup of spelt grains in enough water to cover overnight. When ready to cook, drain the spelt. Bring 3 cups of water or broth to a simmer in a medium pot over medium-high heat, add the drained spelt and simmer for about 1 hour, or until the spelt is tender.

The dressing for this bean salad is quite thick - close to a pesto consistency - but it distributes itself perfectly over the ingredients. Change up the herbs as you like, and feel free to add some other fresh vegetables as well, such as diced zucchini, tomatoes or avocado. If so, add those shortly before serving. With that exception, you can make this salad up to three days ahead and store it, covered, in the refrigerator.



BRIGHT AND HERBY THREE-BEAN SALAD

Ingredients

Start to finish: 15 minutes

Servings: 8

14-ounce can hearts of palm, drained and rinsed, cut into 1/2-inch pieces

15 1/2-ounce can kidney beans, drained and rinsed

15 1/2-ounce can chickpeas, drained and rinsed

15 1/2-ounce can black beans, drained and rinsed

1 cup cooked, cooled spelt (see above or follow package directions)

1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley

2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil

2 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme

1/4 cup rice vinegar

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 cup finely chopped red onion

Salt and ground black pepper

Preparation

In a large serving bowl, mix together the hearts of palm, kidney

beans, chickpeas, black beans and cooked spelt. In a small bowl, mix together the parsley, basil, thyme, vinegar, olive oil and onion. Season with salt and pepper. Pour the dressing over the bean salad and toss to coat evenly. Serve at room temperature or slightly chilled. Nutrition information per serving: 240 calories; 45 calories from fat (21 percent of total calories); 5 g fat (0.5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 610 mg sodium; 38 g carbohydrate; 13 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 13 g protein.