



ON A ROLL

WHOLE GRAINS LEND A HEARTY CHEW TO BREADS AND CRACKERS

by **Kate Parham**

The beauty of the breadbasket lies in the variety of colors and textures; we don't call something as bland or boring as white bread without a reason. Banish the bland breadsticks forever with whole wheat flours, spent grains and other unrefined goodness in your daily breads.

"The food industry as a whole moved away from whole grains, but we're moving back because of our search for variety, marketability and nutrition," says Huntsville, Ala.'s, 1892 East Chef de Cuisine Steve Bunner, whose spent grain bread (recipe, plateonline.com) is all over his menu. "It's our go-to bread [because] whole grains bring character. They change the texture and flavor," he says.

Bunner's not alone in his love for grain breads. Chef Shea Gallante of Ciano in New York City offers a bread service with stone-ground whole wheat flour, flax and sunflower seed focaccia (recipe, p. 86).

"I'm someone who bases everything on flavor, and refining something strips it

of flavor," says Gallante. "I think refined grains are devoid of taste; whole grains are earthy and nutty," he says. "[Whole grains] tend to be chewier than a processed product, but in a good way."

TECHNIQUES TO CHEW ON

Whole grains come with challenges. "They take longer to cook, they spoil faster and lots of people are no longer familiar with them," notes Bunner. "But the benefits are worth it."

Bunner advises blending whole grain flour with refined flour for breads. "As a rule of thumb, one can replace 50 percent of the refined flour in a recipe with whole grain flour with no detriment to the recipe," he says. "But using 100 percent whole wheat flour tends to create dense products, because whole grains are harder than refined grains, and they don't leaven well on their own," he says.

To balance out Wyoming's altitude, Chef Rick Sordahl of Jackson Hole's The Grill at Amangani adds extra yeast to his

Flax seed and sunflower seed focaccia, Chef Shea Gallante, Ciano, New York City. RECIPE, p. 86. whole grain breads. "At our altitude, recipes need leavening—baking powder, baking soda or yeast—to add volume," he says. "Because the gluten content will react differently, you can't improvise as much with baking." He uses whole wheat flour in his blue cheese crackers (recipe, plateonline.com). "The flour stands up to the cheese and imparts a nutty flavor," he says.

Whole wheat crackers may lend themselves to crispiness, but for softer whole wheat loaf, Bunner recommends tenderizing grains by simmering them in water.

"If you don't, the bran may not soften enough during baking, and it could be hard. You have to force the elements in, and boiling is a good way to do it," says

Bunner, who adds spent grain to his starter. Typically, a spent grain has been boiled to make the wort, but if you're using a cracked whole grain—meaning the grain itself and not a flour—Bunner says adding it to the starter allows it to hydrate.

"It also gives the starter time to pick up some of the flavor of the grain," he adds.

Another factor to consider is shelf life. "Whole grain products have shorter life spans on the shelf [than refined products]," Bunner adds, noting that he bakes his spent grain bread daily. But the benefits are worth it.

"[Using whole grains is] like adding sprinkles to a cupcake," says Bunner. "It just makes them better."

Kate Parham enjoys her whole grain breads with a cold beer. For recipes from this article and more, visit plateonline.com.

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