

Colorful Sweet Potato and Quinoa Salad – Comfort du Jour

This dish practically sings “Meatless Monday!” It has lots of color and interesting texture, it works either warm or cold, it’s easy to make from simple ingredients, *and* it’s vegan, low-calorie, high-fiber, gluten-free and flexible on spice. Somehow, it still manages to taste delicious.

Ingredients

2 cups cooked* quinoa (I used tri-color – cooking instructions in the notes section)
1 large sweet potato (mine was a little bigger than the can of beans)
Extra virgin olive oil
Kosher salt, black pepper and cumin
1 can (15 oz.) black beans, drained and rinsed
1/2 medium red onion, chopped
1 cup frozen sweet corn
2 Tbsp. chopped pickled jalapeno (optional)
Fresh chopped parsley or cilantro for serving

Dressing Ingredients

Juice of one lime
1 clove garlic, finely minced
Pinch of sugar (I used coconut sugar)
1/2 tsp. Dijon mustard
Kosher salt, black pepper, cumin and (optional) ground chipotle
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

Instructions

Preheat oven to 400° F. Peel sweet potato and cut into large, bite-size chunks. Toss on parchment lined baking sheet with a generous drizzle of olive oil, season with salt, pepper and cumin to taste, and roast about 20 minutes. Sweet potato chunks should be tender enough to pierce with a fork but not soft enough to smash. Set aside to cool.

Heat a small skillet over medium heat and add a swirl of olive oil. Sauté red onions about 5 minutes, or just until lightly softened. Add frozen corn, salt and pepper to taste, and cook just until corn is heated through.

In a large bowl, combine beans, quinoa, roasted and cooled sweet potato, corn with onions, and chopped jalapeno.

In a glass measuring cup, combine lime juice with Dijon, garlic and spices (use cumin and optional chipotle to your own taste), then whisk olive oil into the mixture until emulsified and slightly thickened. Adjust spices to taste. Pour the dressing over the bowl, toss and serve, sprinkled with parsley or cilantro.

We enjoyed this warm as a Meatless Monday entrée, but it would also be good as a side salad to chicken, burgers or fish, and the leftovers were just as delicious cold from the fridge.

A few notes about quinoa—

Quinoa has been around for thousands of years, but it only surfaced into the mainstream American diet a decade or so ago. It is native to South America—Peru and Bolivia specifically, but is now being grown in the southern part of Colorado (in an area where I once lived) and a few other regions in Washington state and Idaho. It's pronounced "KEEN-wah," and its nutritional value is exceptional, offering high levels of protein, B vitamins, manganese and phosphorous. It's often lumped into the "grain" category, but quinoa is technically related to spinach and amaranth. Although the leaves are also edible, the part we usually eat is the seed, which can range in color from pale straw to red to nearly black, depending on the cultivar. On the pale end, it's mild and almost nutty. On the dark side, expect a deeper earthy flavor.

If the quinoa dishes you've tried had a bitter or soapy taste, it may not have been rinsed well enough before cooking. Nature takes care of itself, and this tiny seed grows with its own special coating designed to keep birds and insects away. Much of that coating is removed during processing before the quinoa gets to market, but you may want to give it another thorough rinse under running water for about 1 minute before cooking it. Use a mesh strainer, because the seeds are very small and will slip right through a typical colander.

Quinoa is a very versatile ingredient, and its mild flavor makes it suitable for all kinds of application. Serve it warm as a breakfast cereal with a dollop of vanilla yogurt and fresh blueberries (talk about a power breakfast!), or season it with herbs and spices as a bed for fish, meat or vegetables. You can also toss it into a salad in place of other grains such as rice or barley, or add it to soup for texture and protein.

How to cook quinoa

You can cook quinoa either from its raw, dried state or you can lightly toast it (after rinsing) in the pan first. A basic recipe is a little less than 2 cups water (or broth) to 1 cup quinoa. Combine in a saucepan over medium-high heat and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a very low simmer, cover and cook about 15 minutes. When it's done, the quinoa will have absorbed all the water and the edges of the seed will separate a bit. It kind of looks like the seeds have little tails. Properly cooked quinoa is fluffy, not soggy or mushy. This recipe will make almost 3 cups of cooked quinoa.