

Protein-Rich Black Quinoa Salad with holiday aspirations

This salad keeps well for several days in the fridge, a godsend during the holidays when you're busy making pies and preparing for out-of-town guests. It's best at room temperature, though, so be sure to take it out of the refrigerator about 20 minutes before you plan to eat. I scored a bag of black quinoa while in Vancouver but you may certainly substitute any quinoa whose acquaintance you happen to make.

Makes 6 to 8 servings

3/4 cup quinoa (preferably black)
1 cup fresh pomegranate arils/seeds
One 15-ounce can black beans, drained and rinsed
1/2 cup diced, seeded English cucumber
1 avocado, diced
2 teaspoons pomegranate molasses
1 teaspoon red wine vinegar
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Set the quinoa in a fine-mesh strainer and rinse thoroughly under cool running water. Place in a medium saucepan with 1-1/2 cups of cold water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover, and simmer gently until grains are tender, most of the water has been absorbed, and the quinoa has sent out little white curlicue tendrils, about 15 to 20 minutes, give or take. Drain any remaining water and set in a wide, shallow bowl to cool completely.

Stir in the pomegranate seeds, black beans, cucumber, and avocado. In a medium bowl, whisk the molasses, vinegar, and olive oil, and season well with salt and pepper. Scrape over the salad and stir well to coat evenly. Sprinkle generously with additional salt to taste.

Serve immediately, or refrigerate and bring to room temperature before serving. May be made two or three days ahead. (For best results, add the avocado just before serving.)