

Wheat Berry Salad with roasted grapes and caramelized shallots

This hearty salad contains wheat, grapes, olives, and caramelized shallots, which add a gentle sweetness. I advise starting the wheat berries ahead. Soak them overnight (if you want to -- it isn't strictly necessary), then boil, cool, and refrigerate. When you're ready to make the salad, they'll be all set to go.

Makes 7 cups (will serve 8 people easily, as a side)

1-1/2 pounds small seedless red grapes (about 5 cups)
8 tablespoons olive oil (1/2 cup total), divided
Sea salt and black pepper
3 branches rosemary
1 pound shallots (about 6 good-sized bulbs), peeled & sliced
3-1/2 to 4-1/2 cups cooked wheat berries* (recipe follows)
1 tablespoon fig balsamic vinegar
1/4 cup pitted kalamata olives, slivered

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment.

Dump the grapes all onto one baking sheet and pat very dry if they're at all moist. Drizzle with 3 tablespoons olive oil. Sprinkle with 1 teaspoon sea salt and 1/4 teaspoon black pepper. Rub in the seasonings with your fingers. Now transfer half of the seasoned, oiled grapes to the 2nd lined baking sheet. Nestle a rosemary sprig under the grapes on each sheet pan, getting it a bit oily, too. (Save the 3rd sprig of rosemary for garnish.)

Transfer to the oven. Roast for 30 minutes, stirring gently and reversing the sheet pans once or twice. Remove when the grapes have burst and the juices are syrupy. Let cool.

Meanwhile, while the grapes are in the oven, caramelize the shallots. Place a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add 3 tablespoons olive oil and the shallots. Sauté a few minutes just to get them going, until they're really sizzling. Then drop the heat down to medium-low and cook more gently, stirring frequently, until deeply browned and very soft, 20 to 25 minutes. You may cool them, or incorporate them into the salad while still warm.

In the bottom of a large serving bowl, whisk the final 2 tablespoons olive oil with the fig balsamic. Season lightly with salt and pepper. Add 3-1/2 cups cooked wheat berries and toss to coat. Gently fold in the grapes with their juices, shallots, and olives. Taste, adding up to one cup more wheat berries if the flavors are too intense. Strip the final rosemary branch and let the needles float over the salad, for garnish.

***To cook wheat berries.** Wheat berries don't need to be soaked, but some people find that soaking makes them more digestible. Soak 3 cups hard red winter wheat berries (found in the bulk aisle of Whole Foods) in plenty of cold water overnight. Drain, and transfer to a large pot. Cover with fresh cold water and salt generously. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer at a gentle bubble, partly covered, for about 50 minutes, until tender but with a pleasant chew. Drain. Spread on a rimmed baking sheet to speed cooling. Once cool, transfer to a zip top bag in the refrigerator. You'll have 8 cups cooked wheat berries, which is twice as much as you'll need for the salad. I always advise making a large batch because you can freeze extras.