

Crusaders' wheat

Buckwheat is a variety of saracen corn (hence its French name, *sarrasin*) which was bought to Europe from Asia by the crusaders. A quick growing annual, some 2 feet (60cm) high with pink and white flowers and reddish-green leaves, buckwheat is cultivated for its small, triangular beechnut-shaped seeds which are dark brown in colour. The plant thrives on poor acid soil and is grown extensively in Siberia, Russia, parts of Holland, Italy, the backwoods of the USA, Brittany and other areas of France. Buckwheat is a principal food in Russia and many Balkan countries and is also popular in Poland and Germany, where the grain is used for brewing beer. It is used to make pancakes and hotcakes and can also be cooked as a porridge. In the USA, buckwheat is used to make hot buckwheat cakes which are a type of drop-scone, or hasty pudding which is served with maple syrup. Groats from buckwheat can be served with meat and egg dishes, as a garnish for soups or to add crunchiness to biscuits. The seeds are hulled, crushed, roasted and then cooked in water (2 parts water to

one part grain) for 30 minutes until soft and fluffy. They can also be cooked with other grains such as rice or barley, or with vegetables. Buckwheat flour can usually be found in health food stores and is most successful in recipes that call for a heavier flour. If you can't find the flour, make it yourself. Buy buckwheat and grind it in the coffee grinding attachment of a blender for long enough to make into flour. Buckwheat is high in protein, iron, riboflavin and thiamin. It also contains a substance called ructic acid which has a beneficial effect on the arteries and circulatory system. Buckwheat is a major ingredient in a macrobiotic diet and is considered to be a Yang (positive) grain.

BUCKWHEAT CAKE

To make, sift 5oz (150g) buckwheat flour in a bowl with 1 tbsp (15ml) of baking powder. Preheat the oven to 350F (180C) Gas 4, and grease an 8 inch (20cm) cake tin. Put 3 eggs, 8fl oz (220ml) runny honey, 1 teasp (5ml) vanilla essence and 8fl oz (220ml) soy or sunflower oil in a blender and blend for 30 seconds. Pour into flour and mix together thoroughly. Place the mixture in the tin and bake for about 1 hour on the middle shelf of the oven. Serve warm with butter. **Cuts into 12 slices**

Russian hotcakes

STARTER Makes 24–28 small cakes

Overall timing 30 minutes plus 2 hours standing time

Equipment Mixing bowl, bowl, small saucepan, frying pan

Freezing Allow to cool, place in a rigid container in layers, separated by foil or polythene. Cover, label and freeze. Freezer life: 2 months. To use: thaw at room temperature for 2 hours then warm through in oven

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp	Dried yeast or	15ml
½ oz	Fresh yeast	15g
4 tbsp	Warm water	4 × 15ml
	Sugar	
½ pint	Milk	300ml
3oz	Plain flour	75g
6oz	Buckwheat flour	175g
½ teasp	Salt	2.5ml
3	Eggs	3
1 teasp	Caster sugar	5ml
1 tbsp	Melted butter	15ml
	Oil	

METHOD

- 1 If using dried yeast, place in bowl with warm water and a pinch of sugar and leave till frothy, about 10 minutes. If using fresh yeast, cream with the warm water and use straight away.
- 2 Add half the milk and all of the plain flour to the yeast mixture and beat well. Cover bowl with plastic film or cloth and leave for 2 hours in a warm place.
- 3 Mix the buckwheat flour and the salt into the batter. In a bowl, beat the eggs, the rest of the milk and the sugar together and mix into the batter. Stir in the melted butter.
- 4 Pour 4 or 5 separate tablespoonfuls on to a hot, lightly oiled hotplate or frying pan and cook till bubbles appear on surface. Turn the cakes over and cook the other side. Brush the cooking surface lightly with oil before making each batch of hotcakes.

Below: Buckwheat as it is bought in health stores and some supermarkets. Use flour in cakes, and the seeds as a garnish or a flavouring for vegetables

