

Tropical Quinoa Custard

YIELD: 8 servings

BAKING TEMPERATURE: 300°F

BAKING TIME: 40 to 45 minutes

If you're a tapioca fan, this rich custard is for you. The lime, ginger and rum make for an exotic flavor, faintly reminiscent of Thai food. If you want something tamer, eliminate the ginger, or try lemon or orange zest instead. Be sure to rinse the quinoa well as stated in the instructions—otherwise it will taste soapy or musty.

- 1/2 cup (3 1/8 ounces) quinoa
- 1 cup (8 ounces) boiling water
- 1 cup (8 ounces) milk
- 3/4 cup (6 ounces) heavy cream
- 3 large eggs
- 3/4 cup (5 5/8 ounces) packed light or dark brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons (1 ounce) dark rum
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 cup (2 1/4 ounces) dried mango, chopped
- 2 to 4 tablespoons (3/4 to 1 5/8 ounces) crystallized ginger, minced
- Grated zest of 1 lime

Rinse the quinoa well (see sidebar, below). Place in a small bowl, pour the boiling water over it, and let the quinoa soak for 1 hour. Drain the quinoa and rinse it again with cold water.

RINSING QUINOA

We found a wide range of quality in the quinoa purchased on our shopping trips, and as a result we varied the way we handled it. Most packaged quinoa comes with instructions to rinse it well in cold water before cooking it. Quinoa grows with a resin on its surface called saponin that protects the plant but tastes awful—

like soap. Quinoa is usually treated with an alkaline agent to remove the saponin as part of its processing, but it's such potent stuff that there's often a bit of residue left, and even that little bit can affect the flavor. Without rinsing, whatever you make with quinoa runs the risk of taking on that soapy flavor. We found that

quinoa sold in bulk often seemed to need a little more rinsing, while prepackaged quinoa was more apt to need just a quick rinse. To rinse the quinoa, place it in a fine sieve and run cold water over it until the water runs clear out the bottom. Taste one of the grains to see if it still has a soapy flavor. If it does, rinse it a bit longer.

Preheat the oven to 300°F. Butter a 1½-quart baking dish.

Place the quinoa in a saucepan with the milk and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until it's thickened, about 15 minutes. Stir in the heavy cream and heat through.

Beat the eggs, brown sugar, rum, salt and nutmeg in a medium bowl with a wire whisk. Gradually whisk in the hot quinoa mixture. Stir in the dried mango, crystallized ginger to taste and lime zest. Turn the custard into the buttered dish.

Bake until the sides of the custard are set, about 40 minutes. The center will still be wobbly—that's OK. Remove the custard from the oven and let cool for 20 minutes before serving.

NUTRITION INFORMATION PER SERVING (1 SERVING, 135G): 11g whole grains, 287 cal, 12g fat, 6g protein, 15g complex carbohydrates, 24g sugar, 2g dietary fiber, 113mg cholesterol, 129mg sodium, 350mg potassium, 253RE vitamin A, 1mg vitamin C, 2mg iron, 95mg calcium, 137mg phosphorus.

BREAD PUDDINGS

When the winter wind is wild outside, it's wonderful to warm up the kitchen and infuse the house with the tempting scents of just-baked bread pudding. These hearty, homey desserts are so versatile—and a simple way to slip whole grains into your diet. They're a baker's best friend, using up bits of leftover bread, yet open to endless variation. Using whole grain bread in place of the traditional white was a bit of a challenge, but we overcame it by increasing the liquid and giving the bread a long period of time to absorb the custard. If you want to make it a speedier process, heat the liquid in the recipe, whisk it into the eggs, and pour the warm custard over the bread to soak while the oven preheats. Because there's a broad range of whole grain bread types, you may need to adjust the liquid in the recipes up or down; in general, you're better off using bread with a somewhat softer crumb, such as a squishy sandwich bread. You'll especially love the ease of these do-ahead dishes; it's gratifying to bake and serve a dish without any frantic, last-minute assembly.