**Barley**

1. **What is Barley**
   1. Barley is a versatile cereal grain with a rich nut-like flavor and a chewy pasta-like texture.
   2. Specific types of barley are considered whole grain; hulled barley (in which the kernels are minimally processed to remove only the tough inedible outer hull) and hulless barley (a type of barley in which the tough inedible hull is loosely adhered to the kernel and requires minimal to no processing).
      1. Hulled barley may be purchased in kernels (berries), cut (grits) and ground (meal and flour).
      2. Both hulled and hulless barley products are in more limited supply, but may be found in some health food stores and in the natural sections of some supermarkets.
   3. Barley is highest in fiber of all the whole grains, with common varieties clocking in at about 17% fiber. For comparison, brown rice contains 3.5% fiber, corn about 7%, oats 10% and wheat about 12%. While the fiber in most grains is concentrated largely in the outer bran layer, barley's fiber is found throughout the whole grain, which may account for its extraordinarily high levels.
2. **History of Barley**
   1. Barley is the root of the English measurement system. In 1324 Edward II of England standardized the inch as equal to “three grains of barley, dry and round, placed end to end lengthwise." The foot, the yard, the mile, and all other English measurements followed on.
   2. Barley originated in Ethiopia and Southeast Asia, where it has been cultivated for more than 10,000 years. Barley was used by ancient civilizations as a food for humans and animals, as well as to make alcoholic beverages; the first known recipe for barley wine dates back to 2800 BC in Babylonia. In addition, since ancient times, barley water has been used for various medicinal purposes.
   3. Barley played an important role in ancient Greek culture as a staple bread-making grain as well as an important food for athletes, who attributed much of their strength to their barley-containing training diets. Roman athletes continued this tradition of honoring barley for the strength that it gave them. Gladiators were known as *hordearii*, which means "eaters of barley."
   4. Since wheat was very expensive and not widely available in the Middle Ages, many Europeans at that time made bread from a combination of barley and rye. In the 16th century, the Spanish introduced barley to South America, while the English and Dutch settlers of the 17th century brought it with them to the United States.
   5. Today, the largest commercial producers of barley are Canada, the United States, the Russian Federation, Germany, France and Spain.
3. **Health Benefits of Barley**
   1. Excellent source of dietary fiber, manganese, and selenium, and a good source of copper, vitamin B1, chromium, phosphorus, magnesium, and niacin.
   2. In addition to its fiber, barley is high in niacin, a B vitamin that has cardiovascular benefits.
   3. Barley is also protective against high blood pressure and has been shown to lower LDL "bad" cholesterol and may help reduce the risk of heart disease.
   4. Barley has more protein than corn, brown rice, millet, sorghum or rye
   5. Higher in fiber and lower in soluble (starch) carbohydrates than almost all other whole grains.
   6. Barley helps increase satiety, and thereby may help you control your weight.
4. **Selection, Storage, Preparation**
   1. `Barley is generally available in its pearled, hulled and flaked form.
      1. Available prepackaged as well as in bulk containers. Just as with any other food that you may purchase in the bulk section, make sure that the bins containing the barley are covered and that the store has a good product turnover so as to ensure its maximal freshness. Whether purchasing barley in bulk or in a packaged container, make sure that there is no evidence of moisture.
   2. Store barley in a tightly covered glass container in a cool, dry place. Barley can also be stored in the refrigerator during periods of warmer weather.
   3. Most of us were introduced to barley as those little white things floating in our canned soup. If that's your only experience with barley, you may be surprised to find that it's endlessly versatile. You can cook it as a side dish, such as a barley pilaf; you can bake barley bread; you can enjoy barley porridge for breakfast; and you can even use barley flour to bake your favorite cookies.
   4. While true whole grain barley can take 50-60 minutes to cook, it's easy to cook a big batch then refrigerate it or freeze it until needed. Or cook it in soups, and enjoy comforting aromas simmering on the stove while you do something else.
   5. Before cooking barley, rinse it thoroughly and remove any dirt or debris that you may find. After rinsing, add one part barley to three and a half parts boiling water or broth. After the liquid has returned to a boil, turn down the heat, cover and simmer. Pearled barley should be simmered for about one hour, while hulled barley should be cooked for about 90 minutes.
5. **A Few Quick Serving Ideas:**
   1. Mix barley flour with wheat flour to make breads and muffins that have a uniquely sweet and earthy taste.
   2. Use cracked barley or barley flakes to make hot cereal.
   3. Toss chilled cooked hulled barley with chopped vegetables and dressing to make a tasty cold salad.
   4. Add barley to your favorite stews and soups to give them extra heartiness and flavor.
   5. Combine cooked barley and healthy sautéed mushrooms for a pilaf with an Eastern European twist.
6. **Fun Facts**
   1. 98% of barley grown in the United States will never make it into your soup! Barley is refined to make barley malt - a key ingredient in beer, and is also grown for feeding animals used for food.
   2. In ancient Egypt, barley was held in high esteem. Barley was used in religious ceremonies and pictured on many early Egyptian coins.
   3. Roman Gladiators were called *Hordearii*, or Barley Men. It's said that they believed barley gave them greater strength and stamina than other foods.
   4. More varieties of barley are found today in Ethiopia than in any other area of comparable size.
   5. Barley is a highly-adaptable crop, growing in places as disparate as north of the Arctic circle, in tropical Ethiopia, and at high altitudes in the Andes mountains of South America.
   6. Barley is the world's fourth most important cereal crop after wheat, rice, and corn.