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## The Epi Log

### Grains Across Cultures

by Joanna Rothkopf  
on 08/04/11 at 11:00 AM

For ages I associated whole grains with the pellets, twigs, and seeds that my health-conscious mother occasionally attempted to shove between my lips.

Was my refusal to try the new food stubborn and childish? Maybe so. But my apprehensions about whole grains co-existed with my ignorance about the flavorful berries--and I can safely say that grain guru Maria Speck's new cookbook [Ancient Grains for Modern Meals: Mediterranean Whole Grain Recipes for Barley, Farro, Kamut, Polenta, Wheat Berries & More](#) has shown me the proverbial light.

In the book, the chef and author rejects the idea that grains should be eaten solely for their healthful properties, embracing the ancient food group for its unique, delicious taste, and cultural significance.

"We want to eat delicious food, all of us, and I'm the first one," Speck told me. "That's why I wrote this book. I was lucky because I was raised in Germany and in Greece where whole grains are still part of the culinary fabric to this day--they were on our table, nobody ever told us to eat them because they are oh-so good for me. They were just there and they were delicious."

Speck was raised on the bulgur recipes of Greece and dark whole-grain, hearty breads of Germany. In her book's introduction, Speck writes of tradition: "The heritage is at the heart of this book. In it, I combine my mom's Mediterranean cuisine--its simplicity, its mesmerizing aromas, and its use of fresh ingredients--with the centuries-old traditions of preparing whole grain foods in northern Europe."

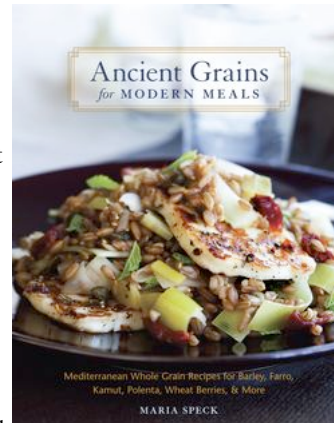
Pick up a copy of the book, and you'll find ideas for breakfasts, dinners, desserts, and breads from Speck's rich heritage alongside beautifully vibrant photography of select dishes. The breadth and variety present in the collection also reinforce the idea that with the recipes come entire culinary traditions condensed, refined, and recorded for your own gastronomical pleasure.

Want to learn more about cooking and storing these versatile grains? Check out this [guide](#).

#### Recipes to try:

- [Amaranth-Walnut Cookies with Brandy](#)
- [Purple Rice Pudding with Rose Water Dates](#)
- [Greek Millet Saganaki with Shrimp and Ouzo](#)
- [Spelt Crust Pizza with Fennel, Prosciutto, and Apples](#)
- [Aroma Bread with Coriander and Fennel](#)

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Interesting. I agree that our tastes are formed in large part by what we're exposed to when we're young. I'm teaching myself to love grains now, but feel I missed out earlier.

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