

Hot Cereal Dressed For The Cold

Plump raisins, flavorful prunes, and charoeth liven up bowls of hearty grains

By Jeannie McDermott

CONTRIBUTOR TO THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

Just after we harvested the wheat on our farm, my mom would sometimes cook wheat berries for breakfast. My sister and I loved its springy, chewy texture. We would beg my mom to make it more often, but she seldom did because the wheat took so long to cook.

More often, we ate oatmeal or wheat cereal, which I liberally topped with butter and brown sugar making it more than palatable and perhaps establishing my love for hot cereal.

Today when the weather turns cold, and especially on bone-chilling days, I still like to start my day with a bowl of hot cereal.

Fortunately, I have found that most stores stock a large variety of grains and hot cereals; some even stock wheat berries. You can reduce the cooking time for wheat to about a half hour by boiling the berries in water for a couple of minutes, then letting them soak for one hour. When I am not that ambitious, I buy a commercial package of wheat pilaf, whose texture is

similar to the wheat I remember from my childhood, but has a relatively short cooking time.

I also love the steel-cut Irish oatmeal, but it needs to simmer 30 minutes. If I am organized in the evening, I prepare some in a double boiler so it can be ready in the morning. I put water on to boil in the bottom, then put the oatmeal and boiling water in the top, and cover. Once the water is boiling in the bottom, I turn off the burner and let it sit over night. In the morning, all that is required is to reheat the oatmeal.

I no longer use butter and a lot of sugar on my hot cereal, but I have developed some alternatives that I also love.

Raisins, of course, are always a good addition, but cold, hard raisins dumped on the top of cooked cereal is not very tasty. Cook the raisins with the oatmeal so they are soft and plump. Sometimes when I make wheat berries, I add low-fat coconut milk (1/2 cup for four servings of wheat) to the cooked wheat and allow it to simmer a few minutes until heated through. The coconut milk imparts a hint of coconut and a bit of sweetness. I also toss in a handful of golden raisins for sweetness and color.

A little cinnamon or a pinch of nutmeg along with raisins is an easy flavor enhancer for oatmeal. Sometimes I top oatmeal with a cherry and prune

compote. Prunes have the unfortunate reputation of being stodgy, but they actually have a rich, bright flavor. I poach them with dried cherries and a cinnamon stick. When the fruit is soft and a thick golden syrup has formed, I add slivered almonds. This makes a sublime topping for hot cereal and no sugar is needed. It is especially good with steel-cut Irish oatmeal.

Another easy cereal topping is charoeth, a traditional Passover dish made from ground almonds, chopped apples, cinnamon, and dried fruits. A large spoonful is delicious on oatmeal, on one of the multigrain hot cereals, or a combination of the two. There are many recipes for charoeth, varying the fruits and nuts used.

When the snow is falling and you need something warm to help you brave the day, take out a box of oatmeal and stir up a batch of steaming, hot cereal. While you're stirring at the stove, get your kids to make some toast, raisin is always nice, and turn on the weather report - they just might announce that everyone should stay at home.

Cherry Prune Topping
1 cup pitted prunes, cut into 1/4-inch crosswise pieces
1/2 cup dried unsweetened cherries
1-1/3 cups water
2-inch stick of cinnamon
1 tablespoon sliced al-

monds
In a small saucepan, combine prunes, cherries, and water. Cover, bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Simmer 20 minutes. Add cinnamon stick and simmer 15 minutes, stirring several times. Add almonds. Store topping in refrigerator until ready to use. Be sure to reheat topping gently in a small pan on a stove or in a microwave before serving. Makes 5 to 6 servings.

Charoeth
You can make this nutty, fruit topping up to a day ahead and store it in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.

1/2 cup chopped almonds
1/2 cup chopped dates
1/4 cup chopped apricots
1/3 cup raisins
1-1/2 cups finely chopped apple
2 teaspoons cinnamon
2 to 3 tablespoons grape juice
2 teaspoons honey

Place almonds in food processor with chopping blade. Process until coarsely ground. Add dates, apricots, raisins, apple, and cinnamon and pulse about 4 to 6 times, until mixed. Scrape into a bowl and mix in just enough grape juice to make a pasty consistency so the mixture sticks together. Add honey. Refrigerate. Before serving, place in microwave long enough to remove chill. Makes 6 (1/3-cup) servings.

Crashes Cleared On Pa. Turnpike Near Irwin Exit

IRWIN, Pa. (AP) - Crashes on the Pennsylvania Turnpike near the Irwin exit in western Pennsylvania are cleared.

Friday morning's crashes closed one westbound lane for a time in Westmoreland County. One crash involved three tractor-trailer rigs and a car. Several smaller crashes were reported nearby, though police say they didn't amount to one chain-reaction incident.

Police say snow squalls created slick conditions. One injury was reported.

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The Fulton County Conservation District is currently taking orders for its annual tree sale. A large variety of fruit, nut, ornamental and forestation trees are available.

Also available are strawberries, blueberries and asparagus.

Deadline for orders is March 6, 2009

An order form can be obtained by calling the Conservation District at 717-485-3547, extension 116 or emailing fccd@pa.net

Profits from the tree seedling sale are used to support environmental education efforts within Fulton County.

Thank you for supporting the Fulton County Conservation District.



Financial Focus

Watch For Positive Changes In Investment Climate

By Edwards Jones Investments

If you look at the performance of the stock market in recent weeks, you'll see some good days and even good weeks - followed by not-so-good days and rough weeks. But if you look beyond these volatile numbers, you might see a story that offers some encouragement for investors in the not-too-distant future.

Specifically, you'll want to pay attention to these factors:

Efforts by Treasury to stabilize financial system - Just a few months ago, the government did not intercede to prevent the failure of Lehman Brothers and other financial services giants. In recent weeks, though, we've seen the U.S. Treasury provide massive support to Citigroup and other major banks. These efforts should contribute to increased stability in our financial system.

Actions by Federal Reserve to increase flow of credit - The Federal Reserve has acted aggressively to free up the flow of credit to consumers and businesses. As a result of the Fed's moves, inter-bank lending costs have dropped dramatically and we've seen an increase in the issuance of commercial paper, which are unsecured obligations issued by corporations or banks to finance their short-term credit needs. And, as the Fed has dropped short-term interest rates to zero, mortgage rates have begun dropping. If 30-year mortgage rates fall to the low-four-percent range, many more consumers should begin to refinance existing homes and even purchase new ones, thus bringing demand back to the housing market.

Economic stimulus package from Obama administration - President Obama and the new Congress are poised to enact a stimulus package including

spending on infrastructure, aid to individual states, a middle-class tax cut, aid to homeowners and other elements. This type of stimulus could have a large, positive and immediate impact on the economy.

Possible last stages of recession - Clearly, we're in the midst of a harsh recession. But we might be closer to the end than the beginning. And, in fact, a majority of the economists polled in the well-respected Blue Chip Economic Indicators poll said they expected the recession to end in the second half of 2009. Of course, even the official end of the recession wouldn't necessarily indicate a robust economy, but it would almost certainly improve the investment environment.

Attractive stock and bond prices - A long bear market tends to drag down the prices of most stocks - even those issued by strong companies whose prospects are good. Consequently, you can now find many good stocks selling for reasonable prices. When the market recovers, these quality stocks are often the first to show impressive gains. And stocks aren't the only good investment opportunity available, either. In recent weeks, bond "spreads" - the difference in yields between Treasury bonds and those bonds issued by other agencies, such as municipalities or corporations - have been wider than we've seen in many decades. Because bond prices move in the opposite directions to their yields, the high yields offered by municipalities and companies likely mean that these types of bonds are now priced relatively low.

So the next time you find yourself shaking your head over the stock market's gyrations, try to focus on building an investment strategy for the future - which may be brighter than you thought.

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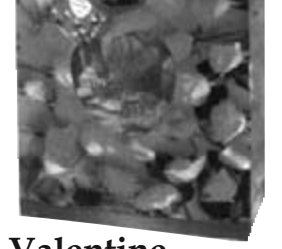
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