



The Magic of Millet

Kristina Locke, founder of Conscious Food, talks about the benefits of millet. It wasn't until I had spent a considerable time in India that I started to fall in love with millet. In the West, we have no real culture of eating millet, and it was only in India that I started to appreciate the amazingly healing and nutritious powers of this ancient grain.

Nutrition

Millet is one of the world's oldest grains and is considered a sacred crop. In the West we tend to think of millet as bird or animal seed but in fact it is one of the planet's most nutrient-dense grains containing amino acids, lecithin, Vitamin E, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, calcium, zinc and potassium. Additionally, millet is made up of 15% protein, has high amounts of fibre, and is rich in phytochemicals that help to lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of cancer. Important for people with allergies, millet is non-glutinous, is extremely high in alkaline, and is considered one of the most digestible grains around. With its sweet, nut-like taste, millet is warming to the body, making it an ideal winter food. .

Where it grows

Most of the millet found in the UK comes from China or the US and the strains are modified. Conscious Food uses three types of millet: Pearl, Finger and Sorghum – all ancient grains coming from different parts of the Indian subcontinent and farmed for centuries using traditional methods. Because millet is such a robust, resilient crop, it mostly doesn't require pesticides or insecticides to grow. In India it is often grown among rice paddies and growing it enriches the soil and increases the earth's biodiversity. In India, finger millet is used to wean babies. Its medicinal properties are valued in Ayurvedic medicine and it is known as a *sattvic* food, which means it is naturally balancing. It is also used as a warming food in the winter. Millet is the one of the only grains that is alkalisng. When you think about that, you might well wonder why we are not all eating it every day.

Spreading the word

Since I discovered millet – and Conscious Food – in India, I have met so many people at trade fairs and small food markets and at a whole host of events where we have been lucky enough to be invited to come along and spread the word about millet, and I am asked again and again why we are doing what we are doing. Well, the message from Conscious Food is that what we are about is connecting with our producers and suppliers. It is about creating nourishment on every level. In the UK, so many of the organic farms are big businesses. In India, the majority of small holdings and farms are still growing crops that have been grown for thousands of years, without the luxury of machinery. If you want to visit these communities, the only way you can get to them is on foot.

Why import millet

Again, another question that frequently comes up is how I can justify importing millet-based food from India when surely the best thing would be to support local UK growers that sell at farmers markets. Well, my belief is that while I fully support the local food movement in the UK, I also believe that we have a role and a personal and social responsibility to support Third World

communities and farmers. It is also essential that we know where our ingredients come from and where they are sourced whether they come from a farm in Kent or from a small workshop in Mumbai. In the West, we have a welfare state and a sophisticated infrastructure. In India, people work hard to get food on the table. Mass farming has a detrimental effect on the land and we forget that while here in the UK, if we have a bad harvest, there will be some kind of subsidy, in the Third World, it could mean starvation. Which, naturally, is why we are so keen to support the farmers who are growing our Pearl, Sorghum and Finger millet. Even there, by using three different types of millet rather than one, we are creating another layer of diversity, something that makes me very happy.

Millet vs wheat

Nutritionally, once I start extolling the virtues of millet, it's hard to stop me. And yet millet is in some ways an extremely humble crop. It doesn't make a song and dance about its inherent values and abundant attributes, which is possibly why I feel the need to stand up for it and shout from the rooftops about just how much good it can do for the planet – and for our bodies! If you think you may have a wheat intolerance, or if you have been diagnosed with coeliac disease, millet can provide a valuable addition to a more varied diet. And regardless of particular allergenic needs, it is good for all of us to introduce new grains into our diet.

So, here goes. Just a few reasons why I love millet. Millet is:

- One of the least allergenic grains
- Alkalisising, and therefore soothing to eat and easy to digest
- High in fibre
- Packed with B Complex vitamins, including niacin, thiamin and riboflavin
- Blessed with a small amount of Vitamin E
- Full of essential amino acids, including methionine and lecithin
- High in minerals – iron, magnesium, phosphorous and potassium
- Warming – it will give you that much needed inner glow in winter
- And what is more, millet seeds are rich in phytochemicals, including Phytic acid, which is associated with lowering cholesterol, and Phytate, which is believed to reduce the risk of cancer.

The future

Here at Conscious Food, one of our aims is to spread the joy about millet. We're feeling ambitious: We want to make millet the new quinoa. We have fallen in love with this magical, mystical grain. And yes, I'll be the first to admit it, you could call it an obsession.

And we've made it easy for you to eat millet with our range of savoury millet crackers and sweet millet biscuits known as Power Snacks. We are also going to be bringing you our wonderful millet flours and millet grain along with some fabulous recipe ideas – so watch this space.

We prefer to say that we're on a mission. We call it **Mission Millet**.

Millet was featured in the Mail on Sunday recently: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1261259/The-GRAIN-attraction-How-make-health-boosting-alternatives-wheat.html>