

## Quinoa

### *Chenopodium quinoa*



**Height:** 1.2 – 2 metres

**Suitable for:** Fertile moist soil.

**Summary:** Not strictly a herb but certainly a crop to experiment with!

Quinoa is very on trend and easily found in the supermarkets. It is an unusual plant in that the seeds are a complete protein containing all the essential amino acids you need for a healthy diet. Low maintenance and pest free it is relatively easy to grow in our UK climate. Certainly something to try out!

#### More information:

Quinoa appeared on the foodie scene quite recently and is now a trendy store cupboard staple. It is however a very ancient crop known as *Gold of the Incas* due to its origins thousands of years ago in South America. We think of Quinoa as a grain but it is actually a seed closely related to spinach and members of the beet family. Anyone who has had a giant spinach plant that has gone to seed will recognise this!

As well as being full of amino acids, minerals and vitamins, Quinoa is also gluten and cholesterol free and packed with fibre. It is fairly easy to grow your own crop in the UK as it copes well with our climate although don't start sowing too early as it doesn't tolerate frost and only grows rapidly once temperatures are warm.

Seeds can either be grown in pots to plant out after the last frosts or sown in rows in late April. As the seeds germinate and grow they look just like the weed *Fat Hen* so do be careful when weeding initially until the plants develop. The seedlings need to be thinned out leaving a 45cm space between each plant, and if growing several rows leave a 90cm row gap.

The plants are quite tolerant of most soil types but do best in a fertile well drained loam. Their eventual height depends on the amount of water they get. In dry areas they will reach 1.2m high but with lots of rainfall or extra watering they may reach over 2m in height. In this case it is a good idea to stake individual plants as they may become top heavy as the seed heads mature.

Harvesting is in early autumn when the leaves start to change colour and drop. On a dry day, bend the seed heads into a large container as you harvest them. Then leave the seed heads in paper bags somewhere dry and cool to finish maturing and drying. The dried seeds can be stripped from the heads and passed through a sieve to remove the dusty chaff and stored in airtight jars until you need them.

**Quinoa seed is coated in a natural bitter saponin which deters the birds.** The quinoa that we buy has been pre-washed to remove this. Before you start cooking give your own quinoa a good soak and a couple of rinses to remove this.

Quinoa has a fluffy texture and a nutty taste and makes a great nutritious alternative to rice and couscous. There are loads of recipe ideas in cook books and magazines — just a few to try ...

- Use cooked quinoa instead of rice or bulgar wheat to create amazing salads.
- Cook and use to replace bread crumbs as crunchy coating to chicken, fish cakes etc before frying.
- It makes a great flavour packed veggie alternative to chilli combined with squash and beans.
- Try substituting quinoa for rice in a creamy mushroom risotto
- Any left over risotto makes an easy stuffing for courgettes or formed into arancini balls as a snack.
- Cooked quinoa can be used as a base for a range of tray bakes and cookies.
- Quinoa seeds can be toasted to create a versatile topping or incorporate into home-made granola.

Remember to soak and rinse your home-grown quinoa first.