

Chef Laurent Pasqualetto's Quinoa Tabouleh Salad

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By Marianne Graff

When I took my first forkful of Chef Laurent Pasqualetto's quinoa salad, my eyes popped wide and my tastebuds cried in delight. Despite the other elegant dishes on the table – a small round of 'Pastel de Choclo' (a traditional Chilean savory meat tart topped with creamed corn and a dash of icing sugar, cooked inside a cornhusk leaf), and the silky smooth, sweetly nutty taste of chañar nut helado (ice cream), I found my fork returning time and again to devour the mound of wholesome quinoa salad.

The finishing touch, and what I secretly think kept me coming back for more, was a fine spray of a great Chilean EVOO over the top of the salad just before serving,

a great way to boost the flavour of this, and other cooked vegetables and cold salads.



Chef Laurent Pasqualetto works for the award winning

Explora Hotel and Lodge, at the San Pedro de Atacama location, near where fields of quinoa grow. Quinoa is one of the few plants that thrive at such high and dry altiplano elevations. When in bloom, quinoa is surprisingly beautiful, with fluffy plumes of yellow blooms topping long stalks in the midst of stark and parched desert surroundings.

Despite the delicate, showgirl appearance of the quinoa blooms, it's a hearty and substantial food, chock full of healthy goodness. Quinoa is high in protein and has the complete range of nine essential amino acids, making it an excellent choice for vegans. It also has magnesium, which has been proven to help those suffering from migraines and severe headaches. And as a good source of iron, copper, manganese, copper and phosphorus, it's an excellent choice for people with diabetes and atherosclerosis.

Usually lumped into the whole grain category, quinoa is actually closer to the spinach and swiss chard families than other grains. The tiny quinoa rounds, which resemble couscous, are made from grinding the seeds.

Interestingly, quinoa's health benefits have been known for a long time in South America, where it was considered 'the gold of the Incas' for its energy boosting power, valued especially by warriors and long distance runners. It's been available for years in stores in Peru, Bolivia and Chile, where it is usually added to soups. Its growing popularity in North America has meant that you can find quinoa sold in a wide variety of grocery stores instead of only at health food stores as in years past.

More important than the health benefits, to my mind anyway, is the fact that quinoa tastes delicious. The slightly nutty, wholegrain taste of quinoa pairs beautifully with a high quality EVOO olive oil based dressing, such as the dressing featuring mint and lemon provided in the quinoa tabouleh salad recipe generously provided by Chef Pasqualetto (below).

This full flavoured salad is surprisingly simple to assemble, making it an easy side dish that would go well with grilled chicken, beef, pork or firm fleshed fish.

To complement this salad, Chef Pasqualetto recommended a number of Chilean wines to accompany this salad, including a pinot noir by Veranda, a sauvignon blanc by Gracia de Chile Reserva, and a carménère by Porta Reserva.

¡Buen provecho! as they say in Chile.

Quinoa Tabouleh Salad by Chef Laurent Pasqualetto (Explora Hotel and Lodge)

80 grams or 3/8 of a cup Cooked quinoa
20 grams or 1.5 TBSP diced tomato
20 grams or 1.5 TBSP diced salad cucumber
10 grams or 2 TSP red pepper
10 grams or 2 TSP diced celery
10 grams or 3 TSP minced onion
15 c.c. or 15 ml fresh olive oil
5 c.c. or 5 ml fresh lemon juice
1 Spring of mint

*Salt, pepper, parsley, chives, to taste

Bed of julienned endive, slivers of red pepper

Spray fresh olive oil

1. Wash and cook the quinoa. Bring to a boil, and strain; repeat 3 times. Strain one last time and set aside.
2. Dice: tomato, cucumber, onion and celery. Mix into quinoa. Julienne the red pepper and reserve ¼ for decorative garnish.
3. Mix dressing: lemon juice, olive oil, salt, pepper, and minced mint. Mix dressing into quinoa.
4. Pack into a mould or custard cups and un-mould into the middle of plate. Place endive around and add red pepper garnish (e.g. like flower petals around the edge of the quinoa salad). Sprinkle salad with minced herbs, and spray lightly with fresh olive oil before serving.