freekah pilaf

P yields 8-10 servings

Move over, quinoa: there’s a new ancient grain in town and it’s called freekah! Legend has it that around 2,000 years ago in the Middle East, a field of young green wheat was set on fire during an attack. When local villagers returned to the scene, they discovered that their crop was actually not ruined; when they rubbed away the charred outer coating, the inner grain was still edible, with a lightly smoked flavor — and freekah was born. I love that it is a firm, slightly chewy grain, with a distinct flavor that’s earthy and nutty. It is loaded with fiber and protein to boot. When I smell it raw, it smells grassy like bird seed, but once it’s cooked, it is divine and is a blank canvas for any add-in ingredients for salads, tabbouleh, or grain recipes.

4 tablespoons canola oil, divided

1 medium onion, peeled, cut into ¼-inch dice

1 clove fresh garlic, minced

14 ounces (2½ cups) freekah

5 cups water

1 teaspoon fine sea salt, divided

½ cup pine nuts

1 cup sliced black olives

¼ cup golden raisins

1 cup curly parsley, chopped

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

zest and juice of ½ navel orange

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

Heat 3 tablespoons canola oil in a medium, ovenproof pot that has a lid. Add the onion; cook over medium heat until shiny and translucent, 5-6 minutes. Do not allow it to brown. Add the garlic; cook for 1 minute. Add the freekah; toast, mixing it well with the onion for 4-5 minutes. It will be fragrant. Add water and ½ teaspoon salt. Bring to a boil, then cover the pot and transfer to the oven for 20 minutes.

Place the pine nuts and remaining tablespoon canola oil into a small pot. Toast over medium heat, shaking the nuts the whole time until golden and fragrant, about 3 minutes. They may be darker in some spots but don’t allow them to burn.

When the freekah is done, remove the lid; allow to cool for a few minutes. Stir in the olives, raisins, parsley, pine nuts, olive oil, orange zest, orange juice, and remaining ½ teaspoon salt. Transfer to serving dish.