A native of the old world, wheat was introduced to the Southwest by Father Kino as he established the “Missionary Trail”. These grains were quickly integrated into the winter fields of indigenous farmers, where they thrived until the early 20th Century. Traditionally, wheat was roasted and ground to make pinole or stretched to make thin wheat flour tortillas (chemait). Wheat berries are also cooked with teparies to make poshol.

Even though they can be grown over the winter in our mild climate, both Pima Club and Sonora White varieties exemplify the soft, spring wheats that are well adapted to the low desert of the Southwest. Compared to hard red winter wheat flours used for bread-baking, soft spring wheat kernels have a softer starch structure, are ground more easily, absorb more water (producing denser baked goods), and have lower protein and gluten. This makes whole grain flours from both Sonora and Pima wheats deliciously suited to “short” baked goods such as scones, cakes, pancakes, empanadas, crackers and piecrusts. Soft flours can also be mixed with higher-protein all-purpose and bread flours for added flavor, texture and color in yeasted or fermented breads.

Traditional Pima Pinole

Sprinkle wheat berries with water, allowing them to moisten. Scrape red hot coals from a mesquite fire into a shallow parching pan or shallow flattened basket. Throw in a few handfuls of moistened wheat berries. The berries will begin to pop and jump. It is important to keep your pan in motion, constantly swirling the contents inside or the contents will burn. As the coals turn to ash, blow them out of the pan.

When the popping stops, scrape any large coals remaining back into the fire. Turn out the toasted grains into a basket and separate out any bits of coal and ash by gently blowing or scraping off the top (they will rise to the top of the wheat pile). Repeat the process with more handfuls of wheat. Grind the parched wheat berries on a stone groundstone or a hand crank stone mill. The ground pinole can be added to water for a filling drink or can be added to baked goods for a mesquite roasted flavor. Use soon after preparing.


Sonoran Salad

This is salad is full of heritage foods of the Sonoran Desert.

1/2 cup dried cholla buds, reconstituted and chopped
1 cup White Sonoran wheat berries, cooked
1 cup brown tepary beans, cooked
1-2 jalapeños or other fresh chile, diced
2-3 l’it’oi onions (greens and bulb), chopped

Dressing:
2 Tbls olive oil
2 Tbls lemon juice

Mix together cooked cholla buds, wheat berries, beans, chile, and onion. In a small bowl whisk together dressing ingredients. Add salt to taste and pour over other ingredients. Can be served warm or cold.
Pozole de Trigo

Traditional *poshol* or *pozole* is a hearty, simple stew celebrating the bounty of the spring harvest. Traditionally served on May 15, soft-cooked wheat berries, fresh corn, and squash are the essential components; the rest of the dish is easily improvised using meat or no meat, and whatever fresh garden produce is on hand. This classic Sonoran version combines wheat, chicken, and red chile. Serves 4-6.

1 cup wheat berries
3 liters chicken broth
3 cups cooked chicken meat, shredded
3 tablespoons vegetable oil
3 guajillo chiles
2 arbol chiles
4 cloves garlic, crushed
1 cup roma or cherry tomatoes
1 white onion, diced
2 T fresh oregano
salt and fresh ground black pepper
fresh squeezed lime juice
8-10 radishes, thinly sliced

Bring chicken broth to boil, add the wheat berries, cover and simmer on low heat for 45 minutes to 1 hour or until soft.

In a blender, grind the tomatoes, chiles, garlic and onion, then pour the mixture into a pan of heated oil and cook on medium heat for 10 minutes, until aromatic and liquid is reduced.

Add the chili mixture and shredded chicken to the wheat berries and heat to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Garnish with fresh oregano, sliced radishes, and lime juice

Herbed Wheat Berry Salad

This sharp, refreshing salad is inspired by *tabbouleh* recipes traditional to the cuisines of the Fertile Crescent where wheat originated. Here, fresh wheat berries are used in place of cracked bulgur or barley. Serves 4. (Recipe adapted from *Jerusalem: A Cookbook* by Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi.)

¼ cup wheat berries
5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
5 oz queso fresco, crumbled
4 i’itoi onions, finely chopped
2 tsp fresh thyme and/or marjoram
½ tsp coriander seeds, lightly toasted and crushed
¼ tsp ground cumin
½ tsp ground allspice
3 oz flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
2 cloves garlic, crushed and chopped
salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ cup hazelnuts, toasted, skins removed, and coarsely chopped

Place the wheat in a small saucepan, cover with plenty of water, and boil for 45-60 minutes or until tender and kernels have popped. Drain well and set aside.

Break the queso fresco into coarse pieces and mix in a small bowl together with 2 tablespoons of the olive oil, the fresh herbs, coriander and cumin, and leave to marinate while you prepare the rest of the salad.

Thoroughly combine the chopped parsley, i’itoi, black pepper, garlic, hazelnuts, allspice, lemon juice, remaining olive oil, and cooked wheat berries. Season to taste, and serve topped with the marinated queso fresco.

Pumpkin Empananadas

This recipe uses 65% whole wheat flour, which provides the flavor and nutrition of heritage grain but is still light and flaky. Makes enough for 12 pastries.

**Dough**

1-½ cups whole soft white wheat flour
¾ cup pastry or all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons sugar
½ cup (1 stick) tablespoons very cold butter
1 large egg
1/3 - 1/2 cup ice-cold water
½ teaspoon anise oil (optional)
1 egg white, for glaze (optional)

Sift flours with salt and sugar into a large bowl and blend in butter with your fingertips or a pastry blender until mixture resembles coarse meal with some (roughly pea-size) butter lumps.

Beat together egg and water in a small bowl with a fork. Add to flour mixture, stirring until just incorporated. (Mixture will look shaggy.)

Turn out mixture onto a lightly floured surface and gather together, then knead gently with heel of your hand once or twice, just enough to bring dough together. Cut the dough into quarters, and cut each quarter into thirds to make 12 equal portions. Roll the portions into balls and cover with a cloth, and allow to chill in the refrigerator or at least one hour while you make the filling.

**Pumpkin filling**

1 large can of pumpkin (16 oz) or mashed sweet potato
3/4 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon anise oil (optional)
1 teaspoon powdered allspice
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Mix all ingredients together well. Roll out each ball of dough into a disc ¼" thick. Place two tablespoons filling mixture on one half of the circle of dough, fold over, and crimp edges with fork. Brush pie with canned milk or egg white and bake on greased cookie sheet at 400 degrees for twelve to fifteen minutes or until pie is golden brown. When baked, sprinkle with mixture of sugar and cinnamon and serve warm.