

Couscous, made with whole durum wheat flour

Couscous from whole grain durum wheat flour can be prepared as a marvelously speedy dinner grain, in the same way that vermicelli pasta can be prepared as a side dish. A volume of water is brought to the boil. An equal volume of couscous is added and stirred with a fork, until the water is almost completely absorbed and the couscous have expanded. The pan is removed from the heat, covered with a lid and left to steam itself until serving time. After the water boils the process takes just one to three minutes. *Much less water proportionately to the couscous is needed if the couscous are cooked when freshly made; perhaps one third to half as much water is needed.*

Making your own couscous in a modern kitchen is extraordinarily simple, provided you have a source of freshly stone ground whole durum wheat flour and a food processor fitted with a metal processing blade. As in making pasta the amount of water added to the flour is approximately 40% of the flour weight, and often less. The action of the food-processing blade on the flour and water mixture produces the granules of couscous in just a few seconds. The couscous are usually dried before being cooked. A warm drying temperature of approximately 100°F can be achieved with an adjustable temperature food dehydrator. Ambient temperature drying using a fan is also a possibility. Dried couscous can be stored in a sealed container for at least 6 months, when stored at cool room temperatures.

Although couscous is most usually made with durum wheat, it can also be made with whole grain flours of hull-less barley, emmer wheat and soft white wheat such as Sonora and most likely other wheat types and other grains. The method is simple enough that experimentation is worthwhile.

Durum wheat couscous pairs well with any dinner dish normally served with rice, mashed potatoes or vermicelli pasta. It will also perform very well as a quick cooking breakfast cereal or with milk in desserts.

The option to make the couscous with some sourdough provides enough acidity by the end of the drying time at 100°F, to break down most if not all of the phytic acid naturally present in the whole grain flour. There is almost no change in flavor as a result of the addition of sourdough, and you can be assured that no off-flavor from an unknown ferment is likely to occur during the drying. The recipe below optionally uses a simple sourdough made by the method described at www.wholegrainconnection.org. Use a smaller amount of water when making couscous, to compensate for the water in the sourdough, which is approximately 5% with respect to the flour weight.

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How to make dried couscous

| Ingredients | Bakers percent | Grams | Ounces | Cups & Spoons |
|----------------------------|----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| Whole durum wheat flour | 100 | 500 | 16 | 3 cups |
| Water, ambient temperature | 35 - 50 | 175 - 250 | 5.6 - 8 | ¾ cup – 1 cup |
| Sourdough (optional) | 10 | 50 | 1.6 | ¼ cup |

[] Measure the flour into a food processor bowl fitted with a metal processing blade.

[] Separately, measure the water into a jug, optionally add sourdough and stir together with the water. Add to food processor bowl. *Smallest amounts of water make finest granules. For larger granules increase the water amount.*

[] Process for one or two seconds. Scrape down sides if needed.

[] Process for a few seconds more until the flour has evenly absorbed the moisture, and granules have formed. *Do not over-process or a dough may be produced. Handle the granules very gently; they easily compress into dough.*

[] Using a fork gently spread the couscous on drying trays of a food dehydrator. E.g. *American Harvest* drier with adjustable temperature, and optional non-perforated trays. Dry at approximately 100°F (38°C) for approximately 24 hours. *Drying is complete when the top tray no longer loses weight, after further drying.*

[] Allow the dry couscous to cool. Store in tightly closed container at cool room temperature.

How to cook dried couscous

| Ingredients | Amount |
|-----------------|------------|
| Water | 1 cup |
| Salt (optional) | ¼ teaspoon |
| Dried Couscous | 1 cup |

[] Use a saucepan with a lid; water should be no more than half filling the saucepan. Bring water and salt to a rolling boil in the saucepan.

[] Add all of the couscous to the boiling water and stir constantly and gently with a fork, until the water is almost all absorbed and the couscous have expanded. This takes 1-3 minutes.

[] Remove the saucepan from heat and cover with lid. Allow to self-steam until ready to serve, 5-10 minutes.

[] Fluff lightly with a fork when serving.