

# Did You Know?

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## **Amaranth** *Amaranthus* spp.

- As a group, plants in the *Amaranthus* spp. have been used for food (both foliage and seed), medicine, dye, in religious practices and for decoration for 8,000 years.
- There are more than 60 different species of *Amaranthus*, most of which grow very tall, have bright red, purple or yellow flowers and broad green or colorful leaves.
- Amaranth was a major food crop of the Aztecs.
- Both the seeds and the leaves became important food crops in areas of Africa, India, and Nepal and more recently in China, Russia, Thailand, and Nigeria as well as Mexico and parts of South America.
- In addition to widespread use as a food among Native American tribes, the Hopi used the red flowers of *A. cruentus* to color bread red for certain dances and the Apache and Zuni tribes used the flowers to make face paint.
- In Mexico, amaranth is used to make a candy called alegria (meaning joy or happiness in Spanish) to celebrate Day of the Dead.
- Though not actually a grain (like wheat and oats), amaranth seeds are valued for their ability to be used like a grain both whole in cereals, breads, muffins or crackers, popped like a corn, as well as ground into flour.
- Amaranth is high in protein, and fiber, is a good source of vitamin C, magnesium, and iron and is gluten-free. It has a complete protein, including lysine, an important amino acid that is lacking in most grains.
- *A. cruentus*, *A. hypochondriacus* and *A. caudatus* are the three species commonly grown for their edible seeds.

For a wealth of good information about amaranth and other whole grains, visit  
[www.wholegrainscouncil.org](http://www.wholegrainscouncil.org).

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