

WHO EATS OATS?

October 4, 2010

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Here in Northern Michigan, especially in winter, we do! And morning oatmeal is the way it happens. But all oatmeal is not created the same. Those of you who love oatmeal will read on, while those of you who don't really know it yet probably won't.

I am not going to flood you here with why oats (and especially whole oats) are healthy. You can get that on the web. What I will point out is that there are different kinds of oatmeal available and how they differ.

Rolled Oats

Take some perfectly good oat groats (oats without a hull) and smash them between two steel rollers and you get rolled oats. All seeds are nature's way of protecting the future. We all know that. So the moment you smash an oat groat, you expose it to the elements and it begins to lose its life expectancy and also its health benefits. It becomes a processed food.

And depending on how much you flatten and further process it determines whether you have regular rolled-oats oatmeal or some form of 'instant' oatmeal, which is further processed. I don't eat these except in Apple Crisp and related deserts.

Steel-Cut Oats

Take the whole groat and instead of smashing it flat, cut it into several small pieces with sharp steel and you have steel-cut oats. Everyone loves steel-cut oats more than rolled oats because it tastes way better and is somewhat healthier. There is still some life protection in the pieces over being just flattened.

Whole Oat Groats

These are the only ones we eat nowadays, and they taste way, way better than steel-cut or any other cut or flattened oats. And they are very much healthier in that all of the precious nutrients and so on are still right there. But there is a price to pay and that is the fact that you unless you want to cook them whole, you have grind them yourself. And we do.

In this super-busy world, who has time to grind oats? Well, it only takes about one or two minutes and it makes a world of difference in the eating. You can pick up a used hand grain mill on EBay for not much or get them on Amazon.com new for about \$19.95. You just put in the oats (or any grain) and grind. Out comes the oatmeal. It is an easy hassle and does not take long.

Grain Mills

We retired our hand mills years ago and invested in an electric mill, of which there are many on the market. Ours is from Retsel:

<http://www.retsel.com/>

It is kind of pricey (\$400-500) but it lasts a lifetime, is built like a tank, and will grind all-you-can-eat flours of any kind, like for bread, pastas, etc. Think about it.

Morning Oatmeal

The morning oatmeal is as easy as pouring about 1/3 cup of whole oat groats into the mill and turning it on. A minute or so later I've got oatmeal at whatever type of grind (fine or coarse) I like. Meanwhile I have been boiling 1 cup of water. I just pour the ground oatmeal into the boiling water, whisk it a bit, and I have fresh oatmeal that also has all the bran and nutrients that the whole oat had.

And, if I am in the mood, I roast the whole oats for a minute in a cast iron frying pan before I grind them and I have toasted oats oatmeal. Too good! My wife Margaret who really is the wizard of grain grinding and oatmeal cooking sometimes soaks the oats ahead of time, causing them to swell up, dries them out in our oven, roasts them, and then grinds them. This is the tip-of-the-top best, but I am just a neophyte in a hurry and have never done that yet, but I piggyback on her dedication in this area.

The pilot light in our commercial oven is so strong that it dries things out. By the way, perhaps the best single kitchen investment we ever made was to purchase a commercial gas oven with six burners. That was in 1972 and it is still perfect today these many years later. And you can often pick up a used oven for very little at restaurant supply houses. Get it steam cleaned and you have something of very great value that will make you smile every time you use it.

So there you have my oatmeal spiel for what it is worth, and for making a great breakfast it is worth a lot, if you have time for one. As I get older there is less and less processed food that satisfies and so are being herded toward whole this and whole that. Whole grains ground are hard to beat in this category. Try 'em.

[PHOTO: Here is a photo of our messy kitchen showing our Retsel grain grinder sitting right out (where it always is) on our counter.... next to the toaster. We use it all the time. Above it are various whole grains. For breakfast, we like to use oat groats and mix in either some barley or buckwheat, depending on how cold it is outside. Buckwheat is the yang of the yang grain. Barley is a little lighter, and oats are the main deal.]

