

## Chapter 49

## Foods of Eastern Europe and Russia

# Grains and Flours

**Directions:** Read the following selection. Then answer the questions under *Thinking Critically*, and complete the activities as directed by your teacher.

Flour is one of the first processed foods made by humankind. The grinding techniques of eight thousand years ago, however, were relatively crude. The stones used to crush the grain were often crumbled into the mixture. Early “flour” actually ground down human teeth.

Milling has improved much over the centuries. Today, different grains may be blended to create a variety of flours.

Wheat was the first grain used for flour. Even today, flour means wheat flour to many bakers. This isn’t surprising because wheat is the only cereal grain with enough gluten for baked goods to rise as desired. Not all wheat flours are the same, however, because wheat exists in several varieties.

Varieties of hard wheat have more protein and gluten. Flours made from hard wheat are used in baked goods when firmer texture is needed, as in bread making. Flours made from soft wheat give a smoother texture to cakes and pastries.

You won’t see bags of flour in the store labeled hard or soft, however. Most flours sold to consumers blend both hard and soft wheat to achieve specific protein content. Bread flour, for instance, may be up to 14 percent protein. Protein content in cake flour may be as low as seven percent.

- ◆ **All-purpose flour**, as the name suggests, is suitable for most home baking, quick breads in particular. This type of flour is white flour, meaning the bran and germ have been removed and only the endosperm of the kernel is used.
- ◆ **Bread flour** is white flour made entirely of hard wheat. It has strong gluten and is especially suited to making yeast breads.
- ◆ **Whole-wheat flour**, or graham flour, is made from the entire wheat kernel and is therefore higher in fiber than all-purpose flour. The bran inhibits gluten development, however, creating a denser product. To retain a light texture, substitute no more than half the all-purpose flour in a recipe with whole wheat.

Other cereal grains are also milled into flour. Having little or no gluten, they’re seldom used alone in baking. When combined with wheat flour, however,

they add an interesting variety of flavors and textures. Some boost the nutrient value of baked goods.

- ◆ **Buckwheat** is dark colored and strong flavored. Thus, it’s used mostly in main dishes, including dumplings and griddlecakes in various cuisines, especially the Russian yeast-leavened crepe called blini and buckwheat groats (porridge). Buckwheat is not wheat but belongs to the same family as rhubarb.
- ◆ **Cornmeal** is made from either yellow or white corn. It’s popular for the pleasantly crumbly, gritty texture it gives to cornbread and muffins, but it can also be added to yeast breads.
- ◆ **Rice flour** is milled from long-grain white or brown rice. Like the grain, the flour is light in color, aroma, and flavor. Some specially formulated recipes use rice flour without added wheat flour as an alternative for people who are allergic to gluten.
- ◆ **Barley** has a distinctive flavor. As a whole-grain flour, it supplies three times the fiber of all-purpose flour. It can replace up to one-quarter of the total wheat flour in yeast bread and one-half the total in quick breads and cookies. It is used to make Barley Raisin Bread.
- ◆ **Millet flour** is a staple in North Africa and India where it’s a common source of protein. In the United States, the tiny yellow seeds are more often found in birdseed mixes.
- ◆ **Rye flour** is used primarily for bread. Darker varieties contain more of the bran than white or medium types, giving a stronger flavor. However, similar to wheat, none has a noticeably strong flavor. Pumpernickel flour is particularly dark and coarse rye flour.
- ◆ **Triticale flour** is the newcomer among flours. Scientists developed the grain in the twentieth century, crossing high-yielding wheat with tough, adaptable rye. This protein-rich flour can replace one-third of the wheat flour in bread. It’s used for baking in Poland and Russia where substantial rye breads are favored. Triticale flour may become more popular as milling techniques are adjusted and the grain itself improved.

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## Thinking Critically

1. What are your favorite breads from Eastern Europe and Russia? How are they served?

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2. What is porridge (*kasha* in Russia)? What cereal products in America are similar? Which ones have you eaten?

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3. What new food or taste sensations of Eastern Europe and Russia have you experienced (for example: caviar, sauerkraut, kielbasa, kolacky)? How long did it take for you to acquire or accept this taste sensation?

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4. How have the foods from Eastern Europe and Russia impacted your diet? Explain your answer.

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## For Further Study

- ◆ Create a Venn diagram of two or more intersecting circles. Compare the similarities of foods or meals of two or more countries in this chapter.
- ◆ Use Internet or print resources to locate recipes for Russian Black Bread. Prepare the bread and compare it to pumpernickel or rye. Which flavor or texture did you prefer? How often would you serve the bread and with what other foods? Share your recipe and information with your class.