A COLOR INVASION has infiltrated grains, and chefs couldn’t be happier. Remember when brown rice was considered exotic? Then came the purple varieties, and the black varieties. Now red rice is turning heads and catching chefs’ attention. Ulikan, Himalayan, Bhutanese and Colusari are just a few varieties of red rice available. There are hundreds more.

"Red rices are really hot," says Michael Holleman, director of culinary development for Indian Harvest, Bemidji, Minn. "Chefs always look for something new. Red rice, like many ancient grain varieties, has been around for thousands of years. There seems to be increasing attention given to heirloom rice and grains. First, black rice got attention. Now red rice is talked about in the same light."

Not only does red rice work in a variety of recipe profiles, but its bold color adds plate appeal. "With heirloom rice varieties, we love its color, texture and flavor. You don’t want to mask it," says Holleman, who recommends enhancing red rice varieties with lighter aromatics and seasonal ingredients. For example, for a hearty side, he tosses diced carrot, parsnip, rutabaga, sweet potato and...
turnip in olive oil and fresh thyme, adds Colusari red rice and roasts until tender.

For scallop/mango mousse-stuffed onigiri (rice balls), Holleman simmers Mountain Red rice blend (a mélange of red and white heirloom rices, black quinoa and green lentils) in vegetable stock. Then he creates a mousse from puréed scallops, egg white, salt, mango, cilantro and cream. He blanches mirepoix in vegetable stock and combines with the rice. Next, he purées a cup of rice and adds it back in for binding texture, and folds in egg whites. Then he forms rice balls, pipes the mousse in the center of each ball and steams in a bamboo basket.

Cooked Colusari red rice tossed with wheat berries, grilled asparagus, red and yellow bell peppers, red onion and balsamic vinaigrette makes a light seasonal salad. “Over time, whole grain rice begins to harden with the addition of acid and sugar from a vinaigrette. If you cook red rice long enough for it to ‘bloom,’ or open up, it will give a different presentation and softness, which will help round out the dish,” Holleman says.

**RED HOT RICE**

Many chefs incorporate red rice into their dishes. Executive chef/owner Chris Bybee serves Moroccan-style chicken with apricots and green olives over Mountain Red blend through his business, Sublime Catering, Longmont, Colo.

Judy Tallant, chef/owner of Tallant House, Fine Sweets & Other Eats, Snohomish, Wash., first learned about red rice at the 2008 Winter Fancy Food Show in San Francisco.

**Sage/Apple-Garnished Turkey Legs, Thighs and Wings with Himalayan Red Rice**

Jodi Lee Duryea, MS, Chef/Instructor
University of North Texas
Denton, Texas

Yield: 6-8 servings

Legs/thighs/wings from 18-20 lb. turkey, or 6 legs
2 oz. butter or corn oil
1 large onion, diced
2 carrots, peeled, sliced in ¼-inch rounds
4 garlic cloves, chopped fine
1 jalapeño, fine dice
2 cups apple cider or unsweetened apple juice
3 celery stalks, sliced
2 hard apples, such as Gala or Granny Smith, peeled, sliced
10-12 oz. Himalayan red rice, washed, drained
Salt and pepper, to taste

1) Preheat oven to 300°F. Have roasting pan or ovenproof dish ready that will comfortably hold turkey parts in single layer. 2) Heat large sauté pan; add butter or oil. Salt and pepper turkey parts. Place skin-side down in hot pan; brown well. Remove; place in roasting pan, skin-side up.

3) Add onion and carrot to sauté pan; cook over low heat until soft. Add garlic and jalapeño; cook 1 minute. Pour in apple cider; deglaze pan (get food particles up into sauce). Add to turkey with celery, apple and sage. Add enough water to ⅔ cover turkey parts (leave most of skin exposed). Put in oven; cook 2 hours. 4) Add rice; stir into broth. Cook until meat is almost falling off bone and rice is tender. Remove turkey; reduce sauce until coats back of spoon. Adjust salt and pepper.

Ulikan, used here in red cilantro/coconut rice, has a mild flavor and earthy aroma.
Francisco. She enjoys pairing red rice with crispy-textured items such as almonds, pine nuts, chestnuts and water chestnuts. “I like it best in the acidic Asian-flavor profile direction,” she says. She builds a cold rice salad with Bhutanese red rice, grilled chicken, mangos, scallions and a vinaigrette based on mirin, grapeseed oil, honey and rice vinegar. “I love letting the flavor of the rice interact and hold its own with the additions, rather than just be a vehicle for them, so I don’t use strong flavors like sesame oil, beef, cilantro, soy sauce, fish sauce or tomatoes with it.”

Jill Nussinow, MS, RD, chef and food/nutrition instructor at Santa Rosa Junior College in Santa Rosa, Calif., first learned about Bhutanese red rice 10 years ago. “Any recipe that uses rice works well with red rice,” she says. “Bhutanese red rice is especially good in salads and side dishes. Thai red rice is best for side dishes, and is most like basmati-type long grain rice. I have cooked red rice with mushrooms, diced vegetables, dried fruit, herbs and spices. It’s a chameleon and adapts well. You can even use it for dessert as a pudding.” Nussinow prefers cooking red rice in a pressure cooker. “The different types of rice require differing amounts of liquid and cooking times,” she says. “Generally, red rice cooks more quickly than brown rice.”

Tallant cooks red rice in a stainless steel saucepan with a lid. “I want more control over it than a cooker allows,” she says. As soon as it finishes cooking, she removes the pan and fluffs the rice before the starch cools and clumps. “Do not overcook or over-wet-cook it, because the kernels break open like popcorn, only it’s gummy. It’s not as attractive that way, and you lose the wonderful chewy texture,” she says.

When Jodi Lee Duryea, MS, senior lecturer/chef-instructor at the School of Merchandising and Hospitality Management, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas, lived in Indonesia during the 1980s, she ate red rice for the first time. “I really like the

Red rice snapshot

Red rice varieties are often sold as pure product or part of blends. Here’s a closer look at some pure product varieties.

Bhutanese red rice has grown for thousands of years at 8,000 feet in the Paro Valley, Bhutan. Russet-colored, this rice has a nutty, earthy flavor and soft texture.

Colusari is named after the city where it grows, Colusa, Calif. It’s a medium-grain rice born from an heirloom seed bank discovered by Indian Harvest, Bemidji, Minn. A deep burgundy/merlot color with a nutty flavor and texture, this rice blends well with other varieties and holds up well on steam tables.

Himalayan red rice is grown in Thailand. This is a long-grain, unmilled rice with a nutty, complex, slightly sweet flavor. It is bright terra-cotta in color.

Ulikan, from the Northern Philippine island of Luzon, is Fair Trade rice grown on the island’s famous rice terraces. It is considered a boutique rice with its mild flavor, earthy aroma and slightly sticky consistency. It is hand-planted, hand-picked and hand-processed. (Proceeds go to help sustain Philippine rice farming.)

Mountain Red blend that has been simmered in vegetable stock is an ingredient in these scallop/mango mousse-stuffed rice balls.
texture and flavor,” she says. “It is tasty, and the chewy texture is a nice alternative to regular white rice. The color is lovely against white fish and meats. I have used it in almost any rice dish, but it does take longer to cook than regular long-grain rice.”

To prepare, Duryea will wash and soak the rice for an hour, and then either steam or drain and prepare. “I find washing it three to four times, until it runs clear, and then soaking it in water for 30-60 minutes helps the rice cook faster and more evenly,” she says.

She uses Himalayan red rice to enhance a Puerto Rican style chicken dish, and prepares sage/apple-garnished turkey legs with Himalayan red rice. She finds red rice pairs well with coconut milk, lemongrass, curry, fish, shellfish and duck. “I have also used it to make rice pudding with coconut milk,” she says. “Instead of cream and coconut sugar to sweeten, I serve it with bananas stewed in coconut sugar and cream, and brûlée bananas on top.”

**COST VS. ADDED VALUE**

According to Holleman, a serving of a white rice variety is about a dime less to put on the plate than an heirloom variety, which can be as much as 20 cents per serving. “However, when operators look at that cost, they can easily justify adding another $1 to the menu,” he says. Most diners won’t mind paying extra for heirloom rice varieties, which are often hard to find in grocery stores.

With its colorful appearance and rustic flavor, red rice perfectly matches an abundance of tastes and textures. “Red rice makes a beautiful presentation on the plate, adding both color and whole grain goodness,” says Nussinow. “It’s an exotic-looking ingredient without a high price tag, and you can impress your guests with little effort.”

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