The simple answer to growing your own quinoa at home is ‘yes’. If you are in the ideal cool climate area of Australia you can grow your own quinoa. In fact, they’re growing quinoa commercially in Tasmania. Kindred Organics – www.kindredorganics.com.au – on the north-west coast of Tassie is the first commercial quinoa grower in Australia, but with the popularity of quinoa rising rapidly they might be in for some competition in years to come. And, with 2013 being declared the International Year of Quinoa by the UN for some competition in years to come. Red and black quinoa are also readily available.

**pronounced keen-wa**

This is white quinoa, the type you are most likely to find. Red and black quinoa are also readily available.

**Quinoa**

Quinoa, the type of grain you are most likely to find. Red and black quinoa are also readily available.

Food and Agriculture Authority, this versatile and valuable grain from South America is sure to become a much more familiar dish on Aussie dining tables.

**Trendy grain**

The fact that quinoa is gluten-free undoubtedly helps to drive growing consumer interest in this trendy grain. But that’s not all in its favour. It’s very easy to prepare and has a pleasant, lightly nutty flavour and is most often used as a substitute for rice, couscous and other carbs as a side dish. It’s lighter and fluffier than rice or couscous, and it can be used in many ways: as a vegie side dish, as a morning porridge, in salads, or as a stuffing for other veggies (see our recipe on page 98). In fact the whole plant is usable, but most often consumers will come across quinoa as a box of grain on a supermarket shelf, just as you currently buy couscous or rice.

**South American**

It was the ancient Incas of the South American Andes mountains who cultivated quinoa and used it as their ‘mother of all grains’ for many centuries (until conquistadors like Pizarro came along to ruin everything for them). Along with potato and corn, quinoa formed their staple diet. These days quinoa is still grown there, notably in countries such as Bolivia and Peru, where it remains a staple grain. While many poor South American farmers have benefited economically from quinoa’s growing world-wide trendiness, large numbers of other poor folk in these countries have seen the price of their staple grain rise as world market prices have risen, with consequences for their health as they can no longer afford to buy as much as they need.

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**In the kitchen**

• **Rinsing**: most packets of quinoa will advise you to rinse it before using (use a fine strainer, preferably, as a colander’s holes are too big). This is to remove the remnant bitter-tasting ‘saponins’ from the grains. These naturally occurring saponins help protect the grains against insect pests. Modern processing gets rid of many of the saponins prior to packaging, but a final rinse is recommended, as saponins not only taste bitter, they can also have an unpleasant laxative effect. Some less thoroughly processed forms of quinoa may need a few more rinses; for these repeat the rinsings until the water is clear.

• **Basic method**: to use quinoa in place of rice or couscous, after rinsing, just add two parts water to one part quinoa (most packets say one cup of quinoa will serve two people). Bring to the boil, reduce the heat, cover and simmer until all the water has evaporated (about 12-15 minutes). Fluff with a fork, serve.

• **Roast vegie salad**: one popular way to turn quinoa into your weekly menu is to roast a mixture of other veggies cut into small chunks (eg, pumpkin, sweet potato, cauliflower, carrot, parsnip, eggplant, zucchini etc) and toss these with cooked quinoa, fresh herbs and a dash of saladressing just before serving.

• **Breakfast porridge**: puffed and flaked quinoa are available as a breakfast cereal or porridge. Cooked in the same way as rolled oats, it takes the same time to prepare as rolled oats. Sprouts take about four to five days to germinate.

• **Salads**: the seed can be sprouted and added to salads.

We hate to be party poopers, but quinoa isn’t a great crop for growing at home (neither is wheat or rice). However, for the record, it grows best in sandy, well-drained soils with low nutrient levels with a pH range from low acid to alkaline (pH 6 to 8.5). It needs good rain when growing but drier conditions for seed to mature and for harvesting. North-west Tassie is ideal but some other cool climate areas could be worth a try as well.
1. Place the quinoa and amaranth in a saucepan and cover with 1 1/2 cups of water. Bring to boil and let simmer for 15 minutes. Turn off heat, cover and sit for 5 minutes. Fluff with a fork.

2. Preheat your oven to 180°C. Cut the tops off the capsicums (retain these, see step 4) and remove the inner membranes and the seeds.

3. Combine the quinoa and amaranth mixture with edamame, carrot, shallots and sesame seeds in a large mixing bowl. Season with brown rice vinegar, pinch of salt and freshly ground black pepper.

4. Stuff the capsicums with the mixture and place in an ovenproof dish. Cover with the 'lids' of the capsicums. Pour 1/4 cup of water into the baking dish. Cover the dish with foil and bake for about 40-50 minutes or until tender.

**Note:** edamame is the Japanese name for soy bean pods. You can buy them in frozen packs at Asian supermarkets. You shell the pods in much the same way as you shell podded peas.