

Vegetarian Times

July 2010

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light summer meals

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IN SEASON

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GRILLED CORN WITH
CHIPOTLE-LIME BUTTER, p. 53
VEGETABLE KEBABS
AGRODOLCE, p. 61

\$4.99 US \$6.99 CAN

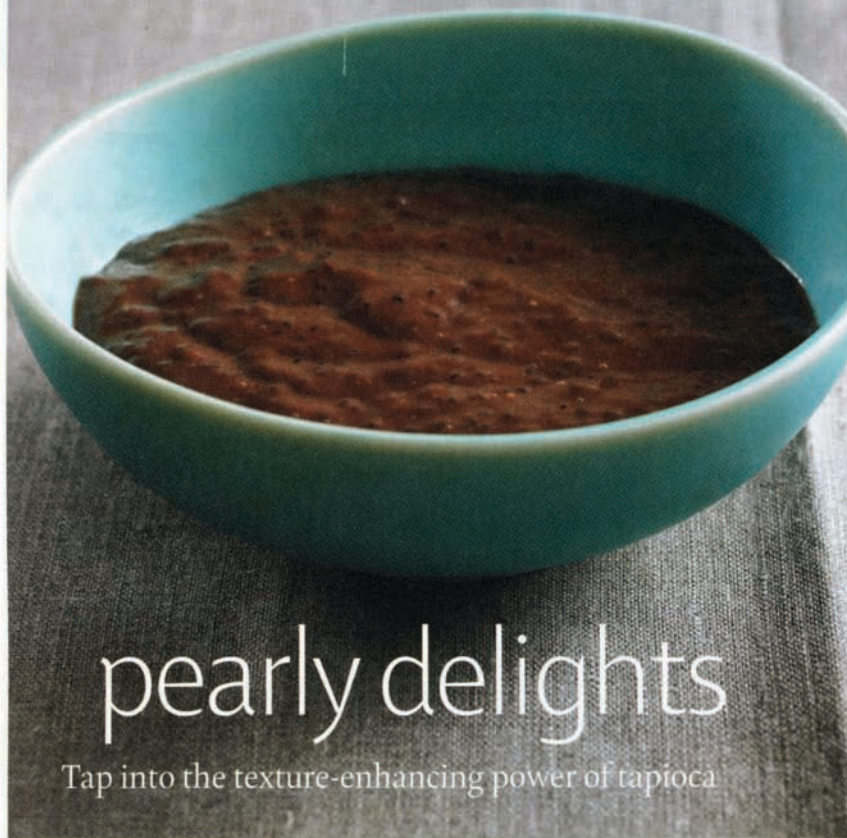


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gluten-free pantry

BY Lisa Turner



pearly delights

Tap into the texture-enhancing power of tapioca

THE SCOOP Certain foods evoke almost visceral memories of childhood, and tapioca is high on that list. Most people know tapioca as a sweet pudding with chewy, intriguing bits, but fresh new uses are redefining this school-lunch favorite.

Tapioca granules and pearls are made from starch extracted from cassava, a potato-like root used in South American and Asian cooking. Sizes range from small white granules no bigger than a pinhead to large black or colored pearls as big as marbles. The pearls have become the darling of chefs because of their ability to absorb flavor and add thickness to chilled soups, mousses, and custards. And tapioca pearls are at the bottom—literally—of the bubble tea (aka boba) craze: the cold tea-based drink gets its name from the large, chewy pearls that look like bubbles clustered at the bottom of the glass.

HOW IT'S USED Tapioca can be simmered in a liquid to thicken it (think pudding) or cooked until semitransparent in water, then drained, and added to a dish for texture.

Cooking times range from 15 minutes for quick-cooking granules to 30 minutes for larger pearls. You can use tapioca to make a flavorless thickener for soups and gravies by cooking the pearls in water, then straining them out, according to Kendall McFarland, product manager at Frontier Natural Products Co-Op in Norway, Iowa. "This works when you want density but not the thickness or texture of the tapioca. The starch is extracted from the pearls the same way boiling potatoes extracts their starch into the cooking water," she explains.

SHOPPING TIPS Find organic and conventional granulated tapioca and tapioca pearls in varying sizes at most grocery stores. For large bubble tea tapioca pearls and a wide assortment of colored tapioca granules and shapes, check out the selection in Asian markets where they may also be labeled "sagou" or "manioc."




Chocolate Tapioca Pudding

SERVES 8

In this recipe, granulated tapioca thickens chocolate soymilk into a luscious pudding without the addition of flour or eggs. Granulated tapioca cooks up smaller and smoother than pearl tapioca, so the pudding may just win over avowed tapioca pudding haters; this recipe converted VT recipe tester Fiona Kennedy.

- 1 qt. chocolate soymilk
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup quick-cooking granulated tapioca, such as Let's Do...Organic
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup gluten-free vegan chocolate chips, such as Enjoy Life

Bring soymilk and salt to a simmer in medium saucepan over medium heat. Stir in tapioca, and reduce heat to low. Cook at a low simmer 20 to 25 minutes, or until tapioca is transparent and pudding begins to thicken. Remove from heat, and stir in chocolate chips until melted. Cool completely before serving.

PER $\frac{1}{4}$ -CUP SERVING: 159 CAL; 3 G PROT; 6 G TOTAL FAT (3 G SAT FAT); 26 G CARB; 0 MG CHOL; 89 MG SOD; 2 G FIBER; 15 G SUGARS   

Chef and food writer Lisa Turner became a tapioca fan after working on this story.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MAREN CARUSO; FOOD STYLING: ROBYN VALARIK; PROP STYLING: CHRISTINE WOLHEIM