

TEGLIO BUCKWHEAT

Observation point: coming down from Aprica into Valtellina

Here you are coming into Valtellina, the valley of Adda river. In front of you, on the lower slope, the town of Teglio lies between terraced vineyards and farmed fields that, in September, become a gorgeous sea of little white flowers: they are buckwheat plantation which, in the middle of the summer, substitute rye, winter or spring wheat and barley, according to the traditional technique of crop rotation.

Despite its name - derived from the shape of its seeds, very similar to buck ones - buckwheat is neither a wheat, nor a cereal; it is considered a pseudo cereal because of its seeds' composition, rich of complex carbohydrates, and for its culinary use, similar to the cereals' one. Actually, it is an herbaceous annual plant of the genus *Fagopyrum*, closely related with rhubarb; it likes cool and wet climate such as medium mountain's one, and well-drained poor acidic soils like those of Valtellina slopes. Here it is sown in July and harvested after about three months.

Another wrong belief is that buckwheat was a typical middle ages wheat as staple food for poor people; it actually gets to Central Europe from Himalaya through Siberia around 15th century, while in Italy starts its diffusion at the beginning of Modern Age. In the Adda valley, the first reference is in the literary work "*Raetia*", written in 1616 by the governor of Grisons and Valtellina. Buckwheat was perfect for the climate of Little Ice Age, so it had a very quick success, due to its high productivity. Buckwheat flour is the base of many traditional recipes of Valtellina, such as "*pizzoccheri*", a sort of dark buckwheat noodles cooked with savoy cabbages and potatoes, with butter and Casera cheese; or as "*chisciöi*", a kind of fritters made of a batter of buckwheat flour, water and grappa, and filled with the same Casera cheese.

In the last century, buckwheat plantations were almost completely abandoned, but in the last decades new interest has been rising up in traditional local species, so its crops were resumed; now, Teglio variety is classed as Slow Food Presidium, and internationally recognized as typical Italian food.