

Wheat

What is Wheat ?

Wheat is a type of grass grown all over the world for its highly nutritious and useful grain. It is one of the top three most produced crops in the world, along with corn and rice. Wheat has been cultivated for over 10,000 years and probably originates in the Fertile Crescent, along with other staple crops. A wide range of wheat products are made by humans, including most famously flour, which is made from the grain itself.

Today, wheat is a grass that grows between two and four feet ($\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{1}{4}$ meters) tall. The physical appearance of the grain is familiar to most consumers, with a long stalk that terminates in a tightly formed cluster of plump kernels enclosed by a beard of bristly spikes. Wheat is an annual, which means that at the end of each year, fields must be plowed and prepared again to grow the grass.

Wheat is very important food

Wheat is the dominant grain of world commerce. It is easily transported and stored and it is used to produce a large variety of foods that include many kinds and types of breads, cakes, noodles, crackers, breakfast foods, biscuits, cookies, and confectionary items. Wheat is the staple food of millions of people. It is also an important part of the daily diet of many millions more. Only rice challenges wheat for the title of most important food grain in the world.

World wheat production increased at a rate of 3.3 percent per year between 1949 and 1978. Increases at the start of this period were due to both an expansion of production area and increased per acre yields. However, starting in the 1960's, increased yields from improved varieties and a greatly expanded use of irrigation, pesticides, and fertilizers took on greater importance in sustaining the high rate of growth in world wheat production. In fact, the impact of new production technologies was so significant that their widespread adoption during this period became known as the "green revolution".





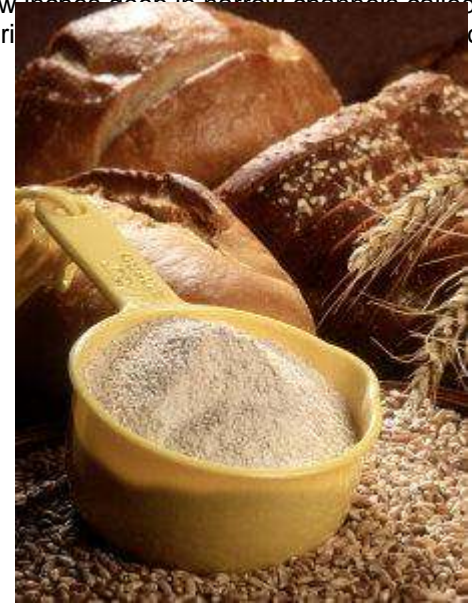
The Varieties of Wheat

The number of wheat varieties exceeds any other seed-bearing plant. There are two general types of wheat -- Winter and Spring -- reflecting the time of year the seed is planted.

How Wheat Is Grown

Wheat grows in a variety of climates and soil. Suitable weather and proper soil are needed to produce a healthy wheat crop. Wheat farmers must use high-quality seed that is free from disease to produce high yields. Farmers also must plant and harvest the wheat at the correct time. They must protect the growing crop from damage caused by disease and pests.

Wheat likes to be grown in fairly dry and mild climates. Weather conditions influence when wheat is planted. Winter wheat is planted from September to November. It is planted a few inches deep in narrow channels called furrows. Snow fills the furrows and protects the plants from the cold. Spring wheat is planted from mid-February to mid-April. It has a shorter growing period than winter wheat.



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