PLANT FACT SHEET

Use with caution

This plant can be harmful if it is eaten raw, in large amounts or without the right preparation. Read the whole fact sheet before use.

Triticum aestivum L.

GENUS *Triticum* **FAMILY** Poaceae

COMMON NAMES Wheat

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Seeds, Cereal, Shoots

Wheat is mostly ground for flour. It is used for bread, chapaties and a range of doughs and cakes.
It is used in fermented and unfermented products.
Chapati flour usually comes from low gluten varieties.
The seeds can be eaten as a cereal. It can be made into flakes, puffed, shredded and other forms or breakfast cereal. Wheat that is parboiled, dried and cracked is sold as tabouli.
Young seedlings are juiced and used as wheatgrass drink.

DESCRIPTION

An annual grass. It easily forms tillers to produce a clump of shoots. Plants grow between 30 and 80 cm tall. The stems are erect and simple. They are usually without hairs. The stems have 5-7 nodes and are hollow between these. The leaf sheath is wrapped around the stem. It is entire at the lower section but split further up. The strap like part where the leaf blade forms is colourless and jagged. The blade is flat, narrow and pointed. It is about 20-37 cm long and 1.2 cm wide. The veins are parallel. The flower stalk or ear is at the end of the stem as a compound spike. It is 5-10 cm long. There are 2 rows of spikelets along each side. Usually 2 grains per spike develop and these are oval with a groove along the centre. There is a tuft of hairs at the end. There are more than 25,000 cultivated varieties.

HABITAT

A temperate plant. It is grown at higher altitudes in the subtropics and tropics. In East Africa most wheat is grown between 1,600 and 3,000 m altitude. The best temperature for germination is about 29°C and the minimum temperature about 4°C. Under good conditions seeds germinate in about 4-5 days. In Nepal it grows to about 3,000 m altitude. Wheat can be grown to 57°N in Britain. Most wheat is grown between latitudes 30° and 60° north and between 30° and 40° south. It suits hardiness zones 9-11.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Seed should be sown into a clean weed free seedbed. Seeds can be broadcast or drilled. Seed should be 2.5-5 cm deep and plants 20-25 cm apart.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Spring wheat has a growing period of 100 days or more. The rainfall of most wheat areas is 750 mm per year or less. In the tropics maturity varies between 95 and 150 days. Yields of 1,420 kg per ha are world average.

NOTES

There are about 30 Triticum species. It is an allohexaploid.
Caution: Wheat grown in hotter more arid areas is higher in gluten causing coeliacs. And highly processed wheat flour eaten in large amounts causes obesity.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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