



Plants & Farming

The people's choice

Wheat

Triticum spp.

Why it was chosen

Today, wheat provides more nourishment for more people worldwide than any other crop.

In the Western diet we use wheat in bread and pasta, but in many parts of Asia it's used to make another food staple – noodles.

British farmers grow roughly 16 million tons of wheat every year and export 5–6 million tons making it our biggest export crop.

What it is

Wheat is a member of the *Poaceae* family and related to cereals such as barley, maize and oats. Its distant relatives include rice, sugar cane and lawn grasses.

Bread wheat originated as a hybrid between three wild grasses *Triticum boeoticum*, *Aegilops speltoides* and *Triticum dicoccoides*, about 10–15000 years ago. Thousands of years of selection have led to our modern, high-yielding wheats.

Where it grows

Wheat is grown on every continent, except Antarctica, because varieties have been bred that suit many climates. The world's largest producer is China, followed by India, Russia and the United States.

Did you know?

New uses for wheat include cat litter, wheat concrete, biodegradable forks and spoons, dog treats, hand cleaners, soap, shampoo, and biodegradable plastic wrap.

What the scientists say

After thousands of years of baking no one understands all of the characteristics required to make a good loaf, or exactly how to breed varieties of wheat suited to a particular type of bread.

Scientists are working with millers, bakers and plant breeders to understand what characteristics and genes are needed in wheat for better bread making.

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