



Barley

History

Barley was discovered as early as 7,000 B.C. in western Asia. It looked like wild grass, but the seeds in the head of the grass were larger and easier to pick. They also tasted good and were not bitter when cooked.

Barley soon became the chief grain of the early Egyptians, Hebrews, Greeks and Romans. It was used as food for people and feed for animals. It was also valuable as money and as a medicine for burns, cuts and bruises. Japan and China have grown barley since 2,800 B.C. It lost popularity only when the Egyptians discovered that wheat would make better bread.

Barley is thought to have come to the United States with Christopher Columbus, but it was not really grown until the Dutch and British colonies were settled.

Geography

Barley is mostly grown in cool, dry, northern climates. It is grown in Europe and as far north as the Arctic Circle. It is also grown as far south as Africa, within just a few degrees of the equator, in the high mountains of Ethiopia. Russia produces much of the world's supply of barley.

In the United States, barley is an important cereal crop. It is grown mostly in the north and west. For the most part, barley is planted in the spring and harvested in the late summer. Some varieties may be planted in the fall and harvested in the summer.

Nutrition

Barley is a cereal grain. Foods made from barley belong to the grains group in MyPlate. Barley is high in protein, complex carbohydrates, B-vitamins, minerals and fiber. It contains almost no sodium or fat.

It is usually eaten as "pearl" barley in soups, pilafs, stews, salads or desserts. It can also be used in cold cereals, pancakes, muffins and breads.