



Rye

History

For centuries, rye was viewed as a weed that grew in wheat. Because of this, however, the true value of rye as a grain was discovered.

Wheat with rye seeds mixed in it was shipped to southern Russia. There it was discovered that the soil and climate was too harsh for the wheat to grow, but the rye did very well. It was harvested and used, even though it made heavier, darker bread.

Because rye could thrive where wheat could not, it became a sub crop. Countries that previously had to buy wheat to make their leavened bread began using rye. During the Middle Ages, Northern Europeans became especially fond of rye.

In the American colonies, maize or corn was the most popular grain. It had saved the colonist from starvation. They grew rye mainly to mix with corn flour or meal in bread.

By the 18th and 19th centuries, rye's popularity decreased, even in northern Europe. The Romans and French had always preferred wheat breads and the Swedes, English, Scots and Danes also began favoring them. The Germans and Russians remained loyal to rye bread, which is still popular. In the United States, rye is used very little compared to wheat and oats. It is mainly used mixed with wheat flour in bread and rolls.

Geography

Rye can thrive in poorer soils and in colder, harsher conditions than can wheat and corn. It is frequently grown in northern and eastern European countries and Russia. In the United States, it was originally grown in the northeastern colonies. As land that was too poor for other crops became available, it was grown farther south. Today, North and South Carolina, Georgia and Oklahoma grow rye. The northern and central states also grow rye, but very little is now being grown in the northeastern states where it was first grown.

Nutrition

Rye is a cereal grain. Foods made from rye belong in the grain group on MyPlate. Foods in this group provide complex carbohydrates for energy, fiber for good digestion and protein. They also provide B-vitamins, potassium, iron and phosphorus. When the whole kernel of grain is eaten cooked or in flour, even more of these nutrients are obtained.

Rye berries or groats can be cooked whole or cracked for porridge. Whole berries can also be sprouted for salads and sandwiches.

Rye is milled into flakes, meal and flour. The flour is sifted during milling to remove the bran and germ. It is then called light, medium or dark rye flour. Light rye flour has all the bran and germ removed. Medium and dark rye flours have small amounts of bran left in for color. Whole rye flour is available, but it spoils quickly unless refrigerated.