



# Wheat

## **History**

When and where wheat was first discovered is not exactly known. Like all cereal grains, it was originally a wild grass. The grass wheat came from einkorn. Evidence existed that it first grew in Mesopotamia and in the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys in the Middle East. As early as 6,700 B.C., Swiss lake dwellers used wheat in flat cakes. It was also mentioned by the Chinese.

Wheat was actually cultivated after millet, oats, rice and barley. However, when the Egyptians discovered how to make yeast-leavened breads between 2,000 and 3,000 B.C., wheat quickly became the favored grain.

Wheat is not native to the United States and was not even grown by the colonists. It did not do well in the New England soil and climate and was in little demand. Not until 1777 was wheat even planted in the United States, and then only as a hobby crop. Today, the United States exports more than half of its wheat and is one of the world's four largest exporters.

## **Geography**

Wheat is grown on more acres than any other grain. Forty-two states produce the six classes of wheat grown in the United States. Soft red winter and soft white wheats are grown east of the Mississippi River. Soft wheat is lower in protein and is best used for cereals, crackers, cookies, pastries, cakes, biscuits, flat breads and Oriental noodles.

West of the Mississippi, the plains states and the Pacific Northwest grow the most wheat. Hard red winter, hard red spring, durum, hard white and soft white wheats are grown. Hard wheats are higher in protein and are best used for breads, bagels, buns, pizza, bulgur and cereal products. Durum wheat is used to make semolina for pasta and couscous. Soft white wheat grown in the Pacific Northwest is especially good for Oriental noodles and flat breads such as pita.

## **Nutrition**

More foods are made with wheat than any other cereal grain. Wheat foods belong in the grain section of MyPlate. Wheat foods provide complex carbohydrates (starch) for energy, B-vitamins, fiber, protein and iron. Whole wheat and whole bran foods also provide additional amounts of fiber, minerals and vitamins. Wheat foods are generally low in fat, except for some sweet or fried foods. Oil, dressings, cheeses, margarine and butter add fat to these foods.