

## Sonora wheat planting suggestions

*These planting suggestions apply to most short season wheat varieties to be planted in the San Francisco Bay Area, and grown without irrigation, through our mild winter. Old-fashioned landrace varieties were always grown “organically”, without irrigation, and should be planted with a generous spacing of seeds, so that each plant can develop fully. This wheat will grow to a height of 3-5 feet. Therefore dense planting, extra irrigation, and extra fertilization will cause the stems to be too long and spindly, and lodge (fall over). Wheat needs to be given a somewhat tough environment to provide a high protein wheat grain on a strong straw. We have seen the best grain grown in a highly fertile organic plot that was not irrigated.*

*Basically the time of planting should coincide with the onset of the distinctly rainy season, in late November. However the planting can be delayed until the ground is deeply moist and there is a dry spell, as is often the case in January. These varieties grow steadily through the winter except for a brief slow down in frosty weather, which they do not like or expect in our climate. Ideally these short season varieties will “head up” by early May when the rainfall generally ceases, and the weather becomes hot and dry. If your climate is foggy during the summer, it is almost impossible to grow Sonora wheat without it becoming covered in mildew or the rust fungus. Instead other wheat types such as spelt or emmer may be more appropriate.*

*Time of Planting:* Late November – January, just before rain is forecast.

*Ground preparation:* Ground should be moist, free of weeds and be raked to provide reasonably fine and even topsoil that can be furrowed with the side of a hoe. Furrows should be approximately 8 inches apart.

*Rate of planting seeds:* Drop seeds at 2-4 inch intervals in furrows and then cover using the hoe.

*Care of wheat plants:* Cut invading weeds rather than pulling them, to avoid disturbing the wheat roots. Avoid irrigating wheat plants, unless there is a severe winter drought.

*Green wheat grass harvesting:* Cut wheat once, back to approximately 6 inches, no later than late March.

*Grain harvesting time:* The wheat is ready, from late June onwards, when there is no green left on the plant and the grain is almost too hard to bite. In general the plant should be so dry it is totally brittle in the heat of the day. Harvest the wheat heads or straw with heads, using a serrated sickle.

*Threshing:* Work the wheat heads, half filling a closed tough cloth threshing bag, underfoot in rubber soled shoes using a “scootching” motion rather than a stamping motion.

*Winnowing:* Outdoors preferably: Arrange a fan on a table and grain catch bowl below on a chair. From above the fan draught, using a bowl, pour the mixture of chaff and grain (from the threshing bag) past the fan draught so that the grain falls into the bowl on the chair and the chaff is carried to one side. The chaff can be collected on a tarp or sheet for later composting. Repeating this process, with the grain collected, will give you clean grain ready for cooking as a dinner grain or grinding to a whole wheat flour.