

## Wheat Quick Facts

Wheat is a highly adaptable cool season grain that can be used for grazing, planted as a cover crop, or harvested for grain. A wet October put many producers behind with planting small grains but some dryer days in recent weeks have allowed folks to catch up, and certainly more will be planted in the next week or two. Below is some general information about wheat production in Tennessee, from the University of Tennessee Extension publication “2014 Tennessee Wheat Quick Facts” written by Dr. Tyson Raper.

Soft red winter is the main class of wheat planted in Tennessee. It has a well-established market for the grain which is used for general-purpose milling, pastry and cake flour. Soft red winter wheat also has adequate winter hardiness to survive our normal winter temperatures. Although very low temperatures may kill above-ground material, growth should resume in spring. It is best adapted to well-drained, medium to heavy soils high in fertility.

UT Extension recommends planting four to five varieties that represent a range of maturities over multiple planting dates. Earlier maturing varieties will joint and head earlier and are therefore more susceptible to stem and head freeze in spring if planted too early. Using certified seed will provide insurance against poor germination and contamination with weed seeds. For more information about recommended varieties, pick up a copy of the “2014 Wheat Variety Performance Tests in Tennessee” which will have variety descriptions and test results.

Soil tests should be taken before making fertilizer application decisions. The target pH range for wheat is 6.1-6.5. A pH meter is available at the UT Extension office if you believe you have a problem with acidic soils. Apply 15-30 lbs. of nitrogen starter to support early growth and another 60-90 lbs. of nitrogen as a top-dressing during February 15-March 30. It is important to apply nitrogen before the jointing phase to prevent lodging.

Weed control is important, especially for wheat to be harvested for grain. Wild garlic can result in dockage at harvest and weeds such as ryegrass and cheat compete for light and nutrients. The use of weed-free seed, using the proper seeding rate, proper seedbed preparation and following a good weed management program in the summer crop will assist in effective weed control. More information on weed control can be found in the “UT Extension Weed Control Manual” which is available at [smith.tennessee.edu](http://smith.tennessee.edu) or at the UT Extension office.

Many insects and diseases can damage winter wheat, reducing both the yield and quality of the crop. Insect pests include armyworms, the Hessian fly, and the cereal leaf beetle. Diseases such as head blight, barley yellow dwarf, and rust can also have a negative impact. Practices such as controlling weeds, using resistant varieties, and crop rotation can minimize damage much of the time. When fungicides and insecticides are needed, consult the “UT Insect Control Recommendations for Field Crops” which is available at the UT Extension office.

Tennessee’s climate is well suited for the production of high-quality wheat which can be used for grain, as a cover crop, or as a cool season forage for livestock. For more information or

to obtain any of the publications referenced here, contact the UT Extension office at 615-735-2900.