



BUCKWHEAT

Fagopyrum esculentum

Buckwheat is not related to wheat, nor is it a grain, but a broadleaf plant. An excellent cover crop, buckwheat is good at competing with weeds overall low-maintenance, and highly nutritious.

PLANTING

Buckwheat does not tolerate frosts and should be planted in May to mature before late summer rains. Some references indicate planting should be delayed until June so that flowering and seed set occurs during cooler weather (we have not tried this). Buckwheat does well in relatively poor soils but appreciates full sun and decent drainage. It will tolerate acid soils better than most. We plant ours in rows 6-12" apart with seeds 1" apart for easier weeding. You can also try broadcasting seed in blocks.

GROWING METHODS

MAINTENANCE

One mid-June weeding was all we needed, although if one were planning to harvest by cutting down the stalks, more weeding would be preferable to keep out weed seed. We do not water our May sowings, to encourage seed-set; however, a later planting would benefit from some watering during the summer drought.

HARVEST

Buckwheat has an extended harvest season because it continues to flower as older flowers are maturing seed. A mid-May planting should be ready for harvest in August but may extend as late as early October. Seed is ripe when it is dark brown to black in color and strip easily off the stalks. Harvest when approximately 75% of the seed on the stalks is ripe. We strip individual stalks into a bucket, which makes threshing unnecessary. It can also be harvested by cutting with a sickle or scythe and laying in windrows until dry.

THRESHING

If the whole plant was cut, thresh by holding the stalks and banging in a trash can or toss them on a tarp and dance on them. Then winnow the seed in front of a steady fan to clean off the chaff.

PROCESSING

SEED-SAVING/STORAGE

For seed-saving, just put aside some of the seed for next year. To ensure the seed is dry, we usually leave ours in paper bags in a warm, dry location, for a month or two, then store in Rubbermaid bins in a cool, dry location.

COOKING TIPS

Buckwheat contains a hard hull that must be removed for whole grain use. "Homegrown Whole Grains" by Sara Plizer, has plans for a buckwheat huller (we have not tried this yet). Buckwheat can also be ground (hull on) into a flour for use in pancakes and other bread products. Buckwheat can also be sprouted.

YIELDS & LABOR

We yielded 1.7-3.4 lbs (4-8 cups) per 100 SF but we plant our buckwheat on the fringes or in poorer soil areas and it is the lowest priority for weeding and harvest. We do not make an effort to harvest all the seed. Reportedly yields 3.3 lbs per 100 SF in a good year. We spent about 0.5-0.75 hour per pound of grain in total labor.

BBGP RESEARCH

VARIETIES

Common buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*) is the one most widely used. We have also trialed *F. tartaricum* (Medawaska or tartary buckwheat), a taller variety.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Buckwheat contains a complete balance of protein (unlike grains). Seeds contain many vitamins and minerals, lysine, and rutin (which keeps blood vessels open and flexible). Buckwheat adds tilth and organic matter to the soil, draws phosphorus up from deep in the soil, and is high in calcium