

## How to Grow Flax

Common flax was one of the first crops domesticated by man. Flax is thought to have originated in the Mediterranean region of Europe; the Swiss Lake Dweller People of the Stone Age apparently produced flax utilizing the fiber as well as the seed. Linen cloth made from flax was used to wrap the mummies in the early Egyptian tombs. In the United States, the early colonists grew small fields of flax for home use, and commercial production of fiber flax began in 1753. However, with the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, flax production began to decline.

### Growing Guide

Management practices for oilseed flax are similar to that of spring oats. It is adapted to soils that are good for wheat or oats, but is not suited to poorly drained soils. Flax should not be grown in the same field every year, but instead should be rotated with other crops to reduce disease potential and improve yields.

Flax should be planted in early April in northern Missouri, or late March in southern Missouri. Although late frosts may occur after flax emergence, they are unlikely to damage flax. North Dakota researchers report that flax seedlings can survive temperatures down to 28°F. upon emergence, and can tolerate the low 20s after they reach the two leaf stage. Seed should be planted 1/2 to 1 inch deep, or up to 1 1/2 inches on coarser soils (such as sandy loams). A standard grain drill can be used with flax, planting it in narrow rows (preferably 6 inches or less).

Grow Flax in full sun. They prefer rich soil. Mix in compost when planting, if your soil is not rich. Keep the soil moist, not wet.

### MAINTAINING

Flax is easy to grow. As wildflowers, they require little care. In the home garden, mulch around them to help retain soil moisture, and to keep the weeds down. Prune plants to promote good air circulation.

### HARVESTING

Flax is not like a soybean plant that completely turns brown and drops its leaves before harvest. Instead, at the time when it is ready to be harvested, there will usually be a few flowers in bloom and a few green leaves on the plant. A rule of thumb is to harvest when 90% of the seed capsules are brown. In northern states, flax is normally direct combined, but sometimes is swathed and allowed to dry in the field before picking it up with a combine.