



SPEC MILLETS



**QUINOA QUALITY APS
TEGLVÆRKSVEJ 10
DK-4420 REGSTRUP**

CVR 40610588

INFO@QUINOAQUALITY.COM

+45-26859506

WWW.QUINOAQUALITY.COM

Description of the crop

Millets are defined as a group of small seeded cereals, that is they are grasses belonging to the Poaceae family. There are many millet species. Millets are adapted to fast development, poor soils and rainfed conditions, and not susceptible to pests.

Millet grains have been discovered from ancient times in pots used for storing seeds, discovered at archaeological sites in China, India, Africa and Europe. Millets have been an important part of the diet across the world.

In India, until the large scale investments in rice and wheat promoted through the green revolution, millets were the staple grains of large part of the population, grown by farmers without access to irrigation.

With growing health consciousness, environmental concern, and the pressing need for updating our food systems to survive climate change, millets, probably the earliest of cereal grains that humans started domesticating, are ready for a comeback.

Technical specs

Seed weight, mg	Seed colour	Growth duration, days
3-8	Yellow or red	120-150

Cultivation

Sowing depth is 2-3 cm, sometimes even less as long as there is humidity for germination and emergence. Millet should be sown in a uniform seed bed in rows of an appropriate spacing.

Weed control is very important, as millet grows slowly in the beginning of the season. Soil is not covered before early or mid summer.

So far we have not noticed diseases and pests, so at least it seems to be more rustic and tolerant to stresses, both biotic and abiotic. The latter refers to its high level of drought tolerance.

Harvest with combine, eventually after cutting, when seeds and plants are mature.

Nutritional value

Millet grain is a good source of energy, protein, vitamins and minerals including trace elements. The millet grain contains 65% carbohydrate, a high proportion of which is in the form of non-starchy polysaccharides and dietary fibres, which help in prevention of constipation, lowering of blood cholesterol and slow release of glucose to the blood stream during digestion.

Millet grains are rich in important vitamins such as thiamine, riboflavin, folic acid and niacin. They contribute to antioxidant activity with phytates, polyphenols and tannins, being important against aging processes and metabolic diseases (Bravo, 1998).

Calcium content is high, especially in finger millet with 344 mg/100g (Thompson, 1993). It makes millets a complete food ingredient suitable for large scale utilization as processed products, snacks, baby foods etc.

Millets are sometimes called farmer friendly crops or the lazy farmer's crop! Just sow it and harvest it. It is not the whole truth, as weeds have to be efficiently suppressed from the beginning, as the millets do not cover neither well or fast the ground.

However, it is true that it requires few inputs, grow in low fertility soils, and tolerates dry conditions.

In India, where millets are important crops, it is mainly grown in the monsoon season, or after the monsoon in early winter.

Millets are resistant to pests and diseases. Therefore it is also used in intercropping with legumes, where a few rows of millets separating rows of more susceptible leguminous crops is a common practice in different parts of the world.

Millets are relatively low demanding crops, which is why millets are often used in organic farming systems in Europe.

Foxtail Millet



Foxtail millet (*Setaria italica*), originates from China, as one of the world's oldest cultivated crops.

Foxtail millet ranks second in the total world production of millets, after pearl millet, providing food to millions of people, mainly on poor or marginal soils in southern Europe and in temperate, subtropical and tropical Asia. It grows in altitudes from sea level to 2000 m. It tolerates drought conditions, hot temperatures and light sandy soils, but not water logging.

Foxtail millet is tolerant of drought because of early maturity. Due to its quick growth, it can be grown as a short-term catch crop. It has a fine stem with high tillering capacity. Its grain is used for human consumption and as feed for poultry and cage birds

Common Millet



Common or proso millet (*Panicum miliaceum*), originates from central and east Asia. Its origin goes back in history at least as far as 2000 BC.

Common millet is later maturing than the foxtail millet, but also with a higher yield potential, therefore being one of the most commonly found millets in the world.

Proso millet was introduced to Canada in the 17th century, and was used in a limited way as a forage crop in the early 1900's. In the United States it is often used as an intercrop. Thereby, Proso millet can help to avoid a summer fallow, and continuous crop rotation can be achieved. Common millet is drought tolerant with a yield potential 1-3 t/ha.

Finger Millet

Finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*), originates in Africa. Finger millet was domesticated 3000 years BC from the wild subspecies in the highlands ranging from Ethiopia to Uganda.

Domesticated finger millet was also farmed in the lowlands of Africa. It was introduced to India 1000 years BC, with the result that India is now a secondary centre of diversity for finger millet.



The height of a mature plant ranges from 30-150 cm in the cool, high-altitude regions of Africa and Asia, where it is grown for its seeds. The seeds are white to dark brown

USES

Millets are used for food, and as cover crop and in wildlife mixes. Millets are consumed in a variety of forms as glutenfree products including unleavened bread made from milled flour. Various types of porridge and alcoholic beverages are also prepared from the seeds.

Millets are a highly varied group of small-seeded grasses, widely grown around the world as cereals for fodder and human food



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Jacobsen, S-E. 2022.
Millet spec. From
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