

Farming in Ancient Egypt

CROPS

What crops did the Egyptian Farmers grow?

Egyptians grew crops such as wheat, barley, vegetables, figs, melons, pomegranates and vines. They also grew flax which was made into linen.

The most important crop was grain. The ancient Egyptians used grain to make bread, porridge and beer. Grain was the first crop they grew after inundation (flooding season). Once the grain was harvested, they grew vegetables such as onions, leeks, cabbages, beans, cucumbers and lettuce.

Farmers planted fruit trees and vines along paths, to give shade as well as fruit.

Where did the farmers grow their crops?

The Egyptians grew their crops along the banks of the River Nile on the rich black soil, or kemet which was left behind after the yearly floods. The fertile soil was ideal to grow healthy crops.

Farming in Ancient Egypt

SEASONS

How many seasons were there in Ancient Egypt?

Egyptian farmers divided their year into three seasons, based on the cycles of the Nile River:

Akhet - the **inundation** (June-September): The Flooding Season. No farming was done at this time, as all the fields were flooded. Instead, many farmers worked for the pharaoh (king), building pyramids or temples. Some of the time was spent mending their tools and looking after animals.

Peret (October-February): The Growing Season. In October the floodwaters receded, leaving behind a layer of rich, black soil. This fertile soil was then ploughed and seeded.

Shemu (March-May): The Harvesting Season. The fully grown crops had to be cut down (harvested) and removed before the Nile flooded again. It was also the time to repair the canals ready for the next flood.

What were the two main farming?

The main farming seasons were the:

- growing season
- harvest season.

In the growing season all the crops were planted. The harvest season was the time when crops were cut and gathered.

Farming in Ancient Egypt

TOOLS

What farming tools did they have in Ancient Egypt?

Ancient Egyptians had simple farming tools such as winnowing scoops, hoes, rakes, flint-bladed sickles and ploughs.



Wall painting

They had both hand ploughs and ones pulled by oxen. The ploughs were used to turn the soil.



Another piece of equipment used by farmers was the Shaduf. See further down the page.

The majority of the tools were made entirely out of wood, or a combination of wood and stone, however, some copper tools have also been found, indicating that they had some metal tools too.

Farming in Ancient Egypt

WATERING

How did the Egyptian Farmers water their crops?

Once the floods receded and the fields dried, the plants would wither and die. The mud that the Nile left behind needed lots of watering in the hot sun. The ancient Egyptians tried to trap as much flood water as possible, so they did not have to constantly get water from the river.

They built mud-brick reservoirs to trap and hold the water. They also had a network of irrigation canals that filled with water during the flood and were refilled from the reservoirs.

How did they lift water from canals on to the land?

To lift the water from the canal they used a **shaduf**. A shaduf is a large pole balanced on a crossbeam, a rope and bucket on one end and a heavy counter weight at the other. By pulling the rope it lowered the bucket into the canal. The farmer then raised the bucket of water by pulling down on the weight. He then swung the pole around and emptied the bucket onto the field.



Wall painting of a shaduff

Shaduf (shadoof) is a machine to move water from a lower place to a higher place.

Farming in Ancient Egypt

FLOODING

What was the flooding season in Ancient Egypt?

Every June, the Nile flooded. This was known as the flooding season. During this time the farmers would mend tools or make new ones. People would go fishing for food or extra money. The flooding was really important because after the river waters had gone down - a rich, fertile soil was left behind, which made the land excellent for growing crops.

What was the area next to the River Nile called?

This area was known as the **Black Land**. Further away from the river was the **Red Land**, a region of inhospitable desert.

When did the Nile flood?

The River Nile flooded every year between June and September, in a season the Egyptians called akhet - the inundation.

Why did the Nile Flood?

Melting snow and heavy summer rain in the Ethiopian Mountains sent a torrent of water causing the banks of the River Nile in Egypt to overflow on the flat desert land.

Why does the Nile not flood now ?

The construction of the Aswan Dam in the 1960's meant that from 1970 the annual flood was controlled.