

When to Swath

Visual plant/pod colour will vary between varieties. Some varieties will appear ripe on the outside before the seeds are mature. **Seed colour** is more important than the overall **visual plant/pod colour** when determining the stage of maturity.

When field topography, soil type and soil moisture levels are uneven, the flat areas of the field may have 30% seed colour change, while the hilltops may be at 70% seed colour change, and the low lying areas may be at 5% seed colour change. This will make the decision of when to swath difficult.

Recent research indicates that the **optimum stage to swath** for both yield and quality is **up to 60% seed colour change**. This enables many growers to start swathing at 30% to 40% seed colour change without sacrificing significant yield or quality. This widens the “swathing days” window for all growers, including those with large canola acreages.

When conditions are hot (30°C) and dry, avoid swathing. Swath during the cool evening hours, at night or early morning to allow plants to dry down at a slower rate. This reduces the chance of green seed.

If conditions are cool and it is late August or early September and frost is forecasted, swath at 10% seed colour change to minimize green seed.

The Canola Council of Canada Grower's Manual, Canola Production Centre Five Year Summary (1990–1994), and annual Canola Production Centre reports contain additional information on Time of Swathing. Check the Canola Council of Canada website for these publications. <http://www.canolacouncil.org>

Harvest

The crop needs time to cure after swathing. The enzyme responsible for clearing chlorophyll requires moisture. If moisture in the swath is good and temperatures are moderate, green seed may drop to an acceptable level for combining within 10 to 14 days after swathing. Under dry or cool conditions, curing may take longer.



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Canola Time of Swathing Guide

To contact your local Canola Council of Canada Agronomist, visit www.canolacouncil.org or call toll free at 1-866-834-4378.

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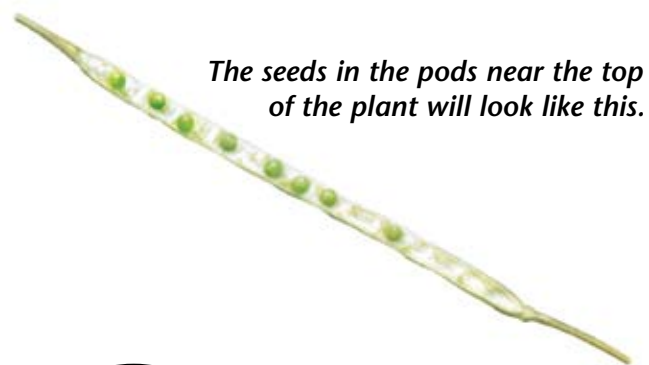
Main Stem

Seed Colour Change

Assess the Field



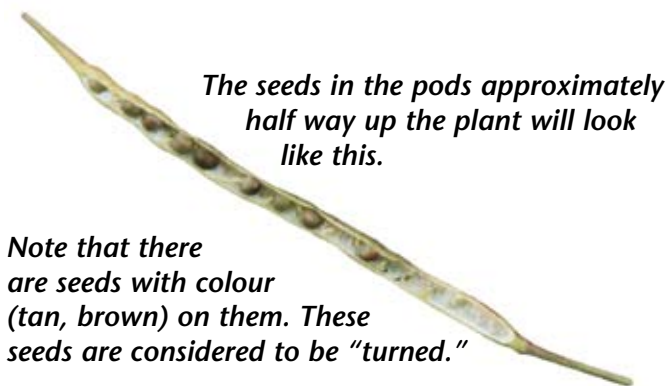
Illustration for determining seed colour change



The seeds in the pods near the top of the plant will look like this.



The seeds are still green, but firm. They will not crush when rolled between the thumb and forefinger.



The seeds in the pods approximately half way up the plant will look like this.

Note that there are seeds with colour (tan, brown) on them. These seeds are considered to be "turned."



The seeds in the pods at the bottom of the plant will be "turned" and look like this.

Swathing at the proper seed colour change optimizes the yield potential of any canola variety while reducing green seed and improving oil content.

The seeds of a canola plant approach physiological maturity and will complete filling at about 40% moisture, and then slowly turn from green to light yellow, or reddish-brown to brown-black, depending on the variety. This curing process starts from the bottom of the main stem. Seed colour change will then progress up the main stem as moisture content is reduced.

Seeds within the pod will change colour an average of 10% every two to three days. Under hot, dry conditions, seed colour change can occur more rapidly but may take longer at cool temperatures.

Assessing Your Field

1. Begin inspecting a canola field approximately 10 days after flowering ends.
2. Sample various parts of the field to make an accurate assessment of the overall maturity of the crop. Stand on the road or in the back of a truck box to compare low lying to higher elevated areas of the field, taking note of how each area appears.
3. Walk out and sample at least five plants in those areas.
4. **Use the illustration (left)** to assist in determining seed colour percentage on the main stem. Include seeds with small patches of colour (spotting). Most of the seeds in the top pods will be firm, and roll without being easily crushed between the thumb and forefinger.
5. Once all areas are sampled, average out the percent seed colour change for that particular field.
6. Continue inspections every two to three days.

Note: Some fields, or large areas within a field with low plant populations may have plants with numerous branches. Assess not only the main stem, but side branches as well to ensure seeds that have not changed colour are firm with no translucency.