Wheat Evolution Through Human History

Approximate Time Period	Wheat Type(s) Dominant	Region / Culture	Historical Significance
~10,000–9,000 BCE	Wild einkorn, wild emmer	Fertile Crescent (modern Turkey, Syria, Iraq)	Earliest domestication of wheat during the Neolithic Agricultural Revolution
~9,000–7,000 BCE	Einkorn	Early Anatolian farming cultures	One of the first cultivated grains; simple diploid wheat
~8,500–6,000 BCE	Emmer wheat	Ancient Mesopotamia and Levant	Major bread and porridge grain of early civilization
~7,000–5,000 BCE	Emmer and early durum ancestors	Ancient Egypt	Supported Nile agricultural economy; used for bread and beer
~6,000–4,000 BCE	Emmer, spelt	Europe (Neolithic farmers)	Spread across Europe with migrating agricultural societies
~3,000–1,000 BCE	Durum wheat	Mediterranean civilizations	Became important in Greek and Roman agriculture
~2,500–500 BCE	Spelt	Central Europe, Celtic and Germanic cultures	Hardy wheat adapted to colder, wetter climates
~1,000 BCE–500 CE	Bread wheat (hexaploid) expands	Roman Empire	Higher gluten content improved leavened bread production
Middle Ages (~500–1500 CE)	Rye, spelt, bread wheat	Medieval Europe	Wheat associated with wealth; peasants often relied on rye/barley
1500–1800 CE	Bread wheat and durum	Europe and Middle East	Expansion through trade and colonial agriculture
1800s	Hard red wheats	North American Great Plains	Mechanized farming and prairie agriculture transformed wheat production
Late 1800s–1900s	Hard red spring/winter wheats	United States and Canada	Became major industrial bread wheats due to protein strength
Mid-1900s	Modern dwarf bread wheats	Global Green Revolution	Norman Borlaug’s high-yield hybrids dramatically increased food production
Modern era	Specialized wheat classes	Worldwide	Breeding optimized for bread, pasta, pastries, disease resistance, and yield
Modern health-food movement	Einkorn, emmer, spelt revival	Europe and North America	Renewed interest in ancient grains for flavor, nutrition, and digestibility