Barley

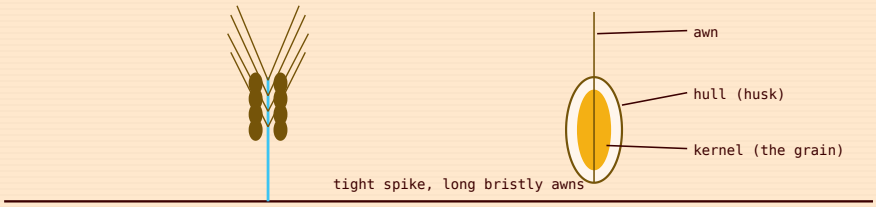
Hordeum vulgare · Grass family

DIFFICULTY Moderate
TYPE Annual, cool-season, direct sown
MATURITY 20–28 weeks

SUN	WATER	SOIL PH	SPACING	DEPTH
Full sun	**Moderate, low near maturity**	**6.0–8.0**	**Broadcast or 15cm rows**	**2–4cm**

01 Spike and awns

Barley carries its kernels in a tight spike, each one topped with a long, bristly awn. Hulled barley keeps a tough husk after threshing, so hull-less varieties are the easiest to use whole at home.



02 Planting

METHOD	Broadcast sow or sow in 15cm rows, raking lightly to cover seed. Hull-less varieties are easiest for home use.
SOIL	Free-draining, neutral to slightly alkaline soil. Barley dislikes acid, waterlogged ground but copes with salty or dry soil better than wheat.
TIMING	Sow in autumn to early winter for a spring harvest — barley is usually the quickest of the winter cereals to ripen.

> Planting timing varies significantly by Australian climate zone. Set your zone above (or use the Find My Climate Zone tool) for guidance tailored to your own area.

03 Growing care

- Water moderately through growth, tapering off as the heads fill and ripen.
- Lime acid soil beforehand — barley is the most acid-sensitive of the common cereals.
- Weed early; a vigorous stand shades out weeds once established.
- Wear gloves and long sleeves at harvest — the awns are sharp and itchy.

04 Problems

- **Net blotch** — brown netted or spotted lesions on leaves; avoid sowing into last season's barley stubble.
- **Powdery mildew** — white powdery growth in humid, dense stands; sow thinly enough for airflow.
- **Barley yellow dwarf virus** — yellowing leaves and stunting, spread by aphids; sow at the right time and control aphid build-up.
- **Birds** — can strip ripening heads; netting may be needed for a small planting.

Pest and disease pages: Birds, Possums and Rats, Powdery Mildew, Leaf Spot Diseases, Plant Viruses. Pest and Disease Finder.

05 Harvest & storage

SIGNS	Stalks and heads turn golden and bend over, and the kernels are too hard to dent with a fingernail.
METHOD	Cut the whole stand, dry fully, then thresh and winnow. Hulled barley still needs its husk removed; hull-less thresh free.
CURING	Dry thoroughly before storage — damp grain spoils quickly.
STORAGE	Whole grain, cool, dry and airtight, 1–2+ years. Milled flour keeps only a few months.
PRESERVING	See Dehydrating (drying grain fully for storage) for ways to keep a harvest surplus.

06 Companions & rotation

PLANT NEARBY

Field peas · Vetch

AVOID NEARBY

No strong known conflicts

ROTATION NOTE

Avoid following barley, wheat or other cereals, which carry over leaf diseases; follow legumes where possible.