

Canola Swath Timing

Staging Canola for Swathing

- Canola plants mature from the bottom of the main stem upwards and from the center of the plant outwards through the branches. Color change can range from a yellow band to a mottled effect.



- As canola begins to mature, both the exterior color of the plant and the seed will change. The exterior color change will vary based on canola hybrid and environmental conditions. It is more important to evaluate color change in the seed to determine swath timing.
- The optimum stage for swathing canola is up to an average of 60% seed color change on the main stem. If a field has lower plant stands and multiple branching, one may want to consider swathing later as the majority of the yield may be on the branches and not on the main stem of the plant.
- Seed color change typically advances about 10% every three days under normal conditions. Under hot conditions, seed color change can occur more rapidly. Seed color change can occur slower when cooler conditions persist. General guidelines indicate seeds on the lower pods will ripen 35-40 days after flowering.



- In assessing swath timing, you need to determine if the crop is uniform and if the plant population is normal (6-10 plants/ft²). Color variation in plants across the field can provide an indicator of maturity and different areas to sample to assess seed color change.

Assess Seed Color Change

- Sample at least 5-10 plants from various locations throughout the field. Include samples from different topographies and areas that show visual differences.



Illustration of ideal seed color change for swath timing (Photo courtesy of Canola Council of Canada)

- For each plant, strip branches away from the main stem and set aside. Starting with the main stem, look for seed color change in the pods.
- Begin by opening middle pods on the main stem and looking for seeds that have changed color. Open pods below the middle pod and again assess. If you see seed color change throughout these pods, you are at or above 50% seed color change.
- Take seed from the upper pods and roll them between your thumb and fore finger to see if they are firm.
- Once you have an estimate of percentage change on the main stem, examine the seeds in the pods on the side branches. Seed from the side branches should be firm to roll. Seed color change may also be started in the lower pods on the side branches.
- When all areas have been sampled and assessed, determine the average percent seed color change for the field.

Swathing a Multi-Stage Crop

- If the field is uneven or contains variable plant populations it is important to determine the percentage of the field that contains the most yield and what stage those parts of the field are in vs. the stage in other areas. Swath when the majority of the yield is within ideal stages. This may result in pod shatter in some spots and early swathing in other areas.

Consider the Weather

- Swathing during hot dry weather (>25°C) can contribute to higher green seed. Under hot conditions, consider swathing at night.
- If frost is in the forecast, you need 3 good drying days after swathing prior to frost to minimize the risk of green seed.

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