

ACTIVITY

Growing Cotton



REPRODUCIBLE MASTER G4-6

When you throw on your favorite jeans, do you wonder how they were made? It starts with a plant and dedicated cotton farmers.

Part 1: Read the passage below and then answer the questions.

Did you know that the United States is the world's third largest producer of cotton? And that cotton is both a fiber *and* a food crop? Cotton is an important plant, and like all plants, cotton needs certain things to grow well.

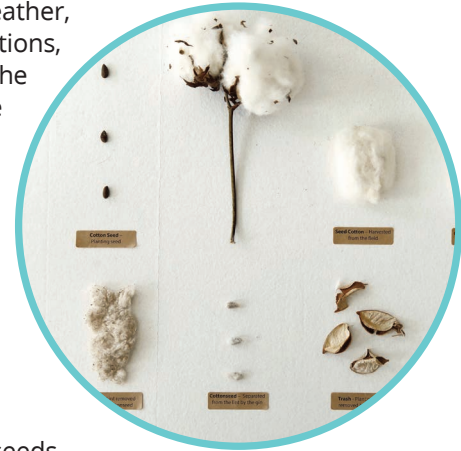
Cotton grows best in warm areas. In the United States, most cotton is grown in southern states. Planting takes place from February to June, depending on location. Cottonseeds grow best in firm, warm, and moist soil. In fact, the soil should be at least 60 degrees Fahrenheit down to 8 inches below the surface.

Once planted, the seeds take about 5 days to sprout. Flower buds called *squares* appear about two months later. These blossoms open and then shed their flower petals about a month after that. They leave behind a green seed pod called a *boll*, which is shaped like a football. Inside the boll are cottonseeds covered with fibers. These fibers continue to grow until they burst open the ripened brown boll, revealing fluffy cotton ready to be *harvested* or picked from the plant. This usually happens about 105 to 130 days after planting.

Throughout the growth cycle, cotton farmers take special care of the crops to help them grow. From selecting seeds

to monitoring the soil, weather, and environmental conditions, farmers work to protect the cotton crops and prepare them for harvest.

Once harvested, machines called *cotton gins* separate the cottonseeds from the cotton fibers. The fibers are used to make paper money, yarn for fabrics, and other things. Cottonseeds are used as cow feed and to make cottonseed oil, which is found in some of our favorite foods such as bread, cereal, and snacks.



1. How warm should the soil be before planting cottonseeds? _____
2. How many days does it take for a cotton plant to go from being planted to being harvested?

3. How can farmers help protect their cotton crops?



Part 2: Several U.S. states produce cotton. Unscramble the letters below to discover the five states that are the largest producers of cotton.

1. SATEX _____
2. IAEORGG _____
3. SSSIIIPPM _____
4. SSKAANR _____
5. FORCILAAN _____