



Source: [Cowpeas](#) | [Infonet Biovision](#)

Watch out for:

- Bugs – They are very difficult to control since they feed on a wide range of crops and are usually very mobile.
- Monitor crops regularly and control weeds to destroy roosting sites.

Cowpeas (*Vigna unguiculata*) are basically annual crops grown for their leaves and seed. The growth habit is climbing, spreading, or erect and they belong to the bean family (*Leguminosae*) (*Papilionaceae*). Cowpeas are native to Africa where they were domesticated over 4000 years ago. The crop exhibits much variation in growth habits, leaf shape, flower color, and seed size and color. Cowpeas are mainly important in marginal rainfall areas because they are well adapted to dry climate and suitable for a variety of intercropping systems. Cowpeas are cultivated for the seeds (shelled green or dried), the pods or leaves that are consumed as green vegetables, or for pasture, hay, silage, and green manure. Tender cowpea leaves and shoots contain 4% protein, and 4% carbohydrates and are rich in calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin B. Dried seeds contain 22% protein and 61% carbohydrates. The leaves may be dried and stored for later use. Cowpeas that are sprayed with pesticides should not be eaten as leaves unless pre-harvest intervals are followed.

Cowpeas are generally tolerant to drought and low light conditions but are very susceptible to a variety of insects and diseases and do not do well in poorly drained and cool areas. Local landraces of cowpeas grown by farmers in West Africa are well adapted so that they start to flower at the end of the rains in a particular locality. The optimum temperature for their growth and development are 20 to 35°C. Cowpeas can grow in a wide range of soils, are well adapted to light sandy soils where most other crops produce poorly, and they do well on acid soils. On heavy fertile soils they show vigorous vegetative growth, but not necessarily a good grain yield. Most varieties need a minimum rainfall of 200 mm during a growing season.