

CASSAVA



Designed By:

cropmanagerApp

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Varieties

There several cassava varieties. These have different attributes, like softness, sweetness, maturity period, susceptibility to pests and diseases, and tuber yields.

Common varieties in East Africa are NASE 1 to 12 however NASE (1, 2, 3 and 4) are tolerant to drought, resistant to mosaic and very high yielding.

Soil requirements

Soil; light sandy loam soils with medium fertility give the best result.

Though the crop can tolerate soils of low fertility, especially if feeder roots can penetrate deeper, deep cultivation before planting is therefore recommended.

Climatic conditions

Your cassava will require optimum temperatures ranging from 25-30°C with a minimum temperature of 18°C. This explains the fall in yields where temperatures are above 30°C.

A well distributed annual rainfall of 1000-1500mm is ideal but the crop can successfully grow in areas with rainfall ranging from 500-2500mm. However cassava is a drought resistant crop and will withstand high temperatures.

Growth pattern

Generally cassava reaches maturity in 9-24 months or up to 36 months depending on the variety, climate and soil conditions.

Some quick growing cultivars can be harvested in 6-7 months, but good yields are normally obtained after 9-12 months.

When used fresh, the tubers are normally only obtained after 9-12 months, otherwise they become very fibrous.

Planting

Cassava is propagated by cuttings got from a cassava plant stem. To make cuttings, choose stems 2 to 4 cm thick, from the strongest plants which are not diseased and have already produced tubers.

After the harvest, tie the selected stems in bundles, wait for at least 10 days before planting them. Keep the bundles in a cool, dry place until planting time. But remember that the cuttings must not be made from the stem until you are ready to plant.

Cut each stem into pieces 20 to 30cm long. There should be 4 to 6 grown buds on each piece.

Cassava is still planted by hand. And planting is done at the onset of the rain season, often in flat fields, though planting on ridges is desirable in wet regions. You can cut the sticks obliquely or at a right angle to the stem being cut.

You can then plant your cutting vertically or at an angle, with half their length in the soil, or flat below the surface.

Weed control

Weeding your cassava plantation is so important during the early stages. It's good to interplant your cassava with other crops like beans during early stages to suppress the weeds. You need to weed 3 to 4 weeks after planting.

Earth up plants (add soil on plants) during weeding as this greatly helps in tuber formation.

You may also use some chemicals to control weeds.

Diseases

The major cassava diseases are Viral disease, Cassava mosaic disease and cassava brown streak disease.

Cassava Mosaic Disease



Symptoms

- Affected leaves become pale or nearly white.
- Affected leaves become twisted and reduce in size.
- Plants become stunted.

Management

- Select stem cuttings for propagation from Symptomless plants.
- Insecticides to control the whitefly vector are not very efficient, intercropping might work and manipulation of planting date to minimize severity.

Cassava Brown Steak Disease



Symptoms

- Leaf Symptoms include circular yellow patches between main veins.
- Purple or brown lesions are observed on young green stems.
- Brown or black tissue in the roots.
- Decay or soft rot of the root in advanced stages.

Management

- Select planting material from Symptomless plants.
- Plant disease resistant cultivars.

Harvesting

Depending on the variety, harvesting cassava for food could begin from the 7th month after planting for early maturing varieties; or after the 10th month for late varieties.

For a smallholder farmer you can harvest the tubers as you need them; without cutting the stems, begin by taking the biggest tubers from each plant, leaving the small ones to give them time to fill up.

As a commercial farmer you would typically harvest all the cassava at the same time.

Once cassava is ready it should be harvested, because when left in the ground for a long period your cassava tubers will lose quality due to hydrolysis of starch.