

Edreda Bampata's passion for herbs drove her to start growing them in 2011, writes Esther Oluka

Very many take to new challenges in life after retiring but for Edreda Bampata, took the leap to start a herbs enterprise.

She traces her journey to herb growing in 2011 when she moved to live in Mukono District.

"Since that time, I have been growing them around my house which is enclosed with a gate. I grow lavender, marigold, peppermint, oregano, thyme, lemon balm, basil, rosemary among others," she says.

There are a number of reasons she cites for venturing into herb growing. First, while pursuing her O and A Level at Gayaza High School from the years 1971 to 1976, one of the school teachers encouraged her to pursue farming because of the opportunities that would arise from that particular field.

"Years later, I even became an agricultural teacher but now I am retired," she says.

The second reason was because she was tired of buying dry herbal products from the supermarkets. So, she thought why not grow her own herbs at home?

Lastly, according to Bampata, the different health benefits that come with herbs pushed her into cultivating them at her home. Some of the herbs she grows help treat colds, cough, skin ailments, indigestion, and toothache, among other ailments.

"For example, the lemon balm I grow has a number of advantages including reducing stress and anxiety. In many circles, it is known as a soothing herb," she says, adding, "Then, there is the rosemary that is commonly used in preparation of food because of its pleasant aroma. The oregano herbs can also be used in cooking as well as treating different skin conditions such as acne." The other herbs also have their own advantages.

Benefits

The herbs are both for personal and commercial use. Many times when Bampata is going to prepare either tea or food, she will walk up to her garden and pick a particular herb which she mixes with whatever she is preparing. The 63-year-old prefers using them while still fresh as opposed to boiling and drying them which processes destroy some nutrients.

Then, whenever the mother-of-four gets a cold, cough, digestive issues or skin condition, she knows which particular herb to pick from her garden.

"I have knowledge of what ailments these herbs can treat because I read extensively on them from different literature including books and the internet," she says.

She reveals majority of her clients are friends. They help spread the word out there after recommending her different herbs. She has never gone outside her home looking for clients.

Earning from growing herbs

Bampata does not want to excite people by saying that she is earning a lot of money and then when they decide to venture into the same trade, they get disappointed.



Bampata plucking a leaf from a cinnamon tree (below and right) she holds a young mint. PHOTOS BY ESTHER OLUKA



Bampata earning from herbs



"But I have had instances where people people walk into my home

shs 200,000

AMOUNT OF MONEY THE 63-YEAR-OLD LADY EARNS PER ROUND OF HERBS SELL

and left me with Shs200, 000 after purchasing particular herbs," she says.

The herbs are sold at different prices. A small pot containing a particular herb can range from the prices of Shs1, 000 to Shs3, 000. Then, the seedlings can range from the prices of Shs3, 000 to Shs20, 000 depending on how big the plant is. For instance, she sells the rosemary between the prices of Shs2, 000 to Shs5, 000.

Making a herbal garden

In case one is interested in growing herbs, all they need is starting material and the passion for it, Bampata says.

They would also need to have a good understanding of herb growing, therefore, it is important they read and do their research thoroughly.

"It is easier to start with an already growing plant (seedling)," she says.

Afterwards, they should go ahead to prepare the garden by having it cleared.

"Do not forget to add manure as many seedlings thrive with it in place. Once you have placed the seedling, water it," she says, adding, "I however strongly discourage against overwatering the plants as the roots may over flood and cause the plant to wilt."

Watering should be done during both morning and evening hours. One does not need to water them in the rain season.

TOP FIVE HERBS TO GROW IN POTS

Basil

It enjoys full sun but not too much direct sunlight. Put it in a partly shaded area.

Being under the sun often, it dries out fast so regular watering may be needed. But it can tolerate infrequent watering as long as it hasn't wilted yet.

Mint

It likes slightly moist soil and partial shade. Mint is a very invasive herb so do not plant together with other herbs in a single container. Don't keep it close with other potted plants either as it propagates easily and often, uncontrollably.

Parsley

Parsley thrives in normal growing conditions: partial to full sun and slight moist to moist soil. Just ensure proper soil drainage as it doesn't thrive in extremely wet soil.

Rosemary

It grows best in slightly moist and well-drained soil, and under partial to full sun. Like basil, it could thus dry out if not watered. Don't mist and water by soaking to prevent fungal diseases.

Thyme

Thyme can grow in less fertile, but well-drained soil as long as it's exposed to full sun and average water. This herb can handle a little neglect as it grows well in hot and dry conditions.

Difficulties

Regarding the challenges that come with herb growing, Bampata says there are number to deal with

including diseases. These include both bacterial and viral. Then, there are the pests like the leaf miners that eat the leaf tissue of plants, other parasitic plants and then the unpredictable weather.

"The plants tend to wither a lot during the dry season for example the oregano," she says.

Bampata does not believe in spraying with chemicals including pesticides because they are dangerous and toxic for human consumption.

"For this reason, I never spray my herbs and this often makes me feel at ease when consuming them. It is why I highly encourage people to have their own gardens because one is aware of what they are eating unlike when they just buy the produce from the market."

Value addition

She turns some of the herbs into powders which she later packages and sells to interested clients.

According to Bampata, a small tin of powdered cinnamon costs Shs5, 000 while the bigger tin goes for Shs10, 000. "Powdered cinnamon is very sells like hotcake," she says.

She does not add any artificial preservatives. Although some of the herbs work independently, there are others that work well when combined to treat particular ailments. B

ampata is still researching on which herbs work best together and what diseases they can help eradicate.

Advise to others

Bampata says one does not have to have a huge chunk of land in order to venture into herb growing.

"Simply get a sack, put in soil and plant your herbs. You can also use containers," she says.

Other than that, she highly encourages individuals to venture into herb growing because of their natural medicinal and income value.