

Good farm practices give succulent vegetables. PHOTO GODFREY LUGAAJU

These best farming vegetable practices will earn you money

Some farmers have had poor yields from their vegetable farms. The poor yields have directly affected the profits to the farmers. **Esther Bridget Nakalya** talked to experts on best practices.

Nutritional researchers have established that a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and low fat dairy products may potentially control the risk of high blood pressure among other illnesses.

"Uganda has abundant potential to produce fruits and vegetables, which is guaranteed by the fertile soils and conducive climate that allows for vegetable production for a greater part of the year," recent reports from the Uganda-UK Convention on vegetable sector profile say.

The studies assess a low production of fruits and vegetables regardless of the great production potential in the country.

The market for these vegetable products can be easily accessed right from the time of production in seedling handling suggests Miriam Nakiganda, the marketing manager at Grow more seeds Uganda.

"The handling one gives to seeds is a major determinant of the market. Farmers should look out for good quality seeds through trial and monitoring where they get to understand which quality may yield good produce," she advises.

Steven Mbusa, an agronomist at Grow more seeds Uganda, shares the tips of best practices involved in vegetable production.

Making a vegetable nursery bed

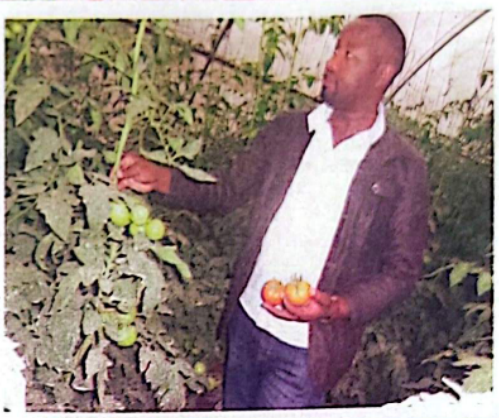
"Pick a good site with open space of one by three metres depending on how much planting you intend to do. Ensure that the soil is fertile and waterlogged as it ought to be heaped in moisture before planting."

The following day Mbusa recommends rows of 10 or 15metres spacing before stuffing the seeds in the soil and later covering them up with dry grass.

"You need to regularly check the soils and ensure they are moist until the seedlings are out which at this stage ,then place them in a nursery bed shade," he adds.

Mbusa advises that after about three to four weeks, one may transfer the seeds. Nakiganda advises farmers to establishr the soil altitude and type before planting as some crops grow best in loam soil and others in swampy soils.

"During planting, space 10 or 20centimeters depending on output as some crops are bushy while others are not for example, Nakati and Amaranthus. The spacing also depends largely on whether you are intercropping different vegetables," she explains.



4,000

COST OF A KILOGRAMME OF RIPE TOMATOES

Fertilising

Mbusa recommends small amounts of about 200gramms of Diammonium Phosphate in case of infertile soils in order to help in root development. He says, "After the seeds have germinated do not apply fertilisers as they may damage the crop. The fertilisers are best applied in the first two weeks after the bed is laid simply because the roots can easily access them then."

Pesticides

According to Nakiganda, there are many pesticides that have been introduced in the market, most of which she says are not effective enough as they do not entirely kill pests such as the moth that fly at night.

"Look out for effective pesticides and manage them in order to avoid the fruiting of the crop."

Mbusa recommends pesticides that have the chlorpyrifos effect as they actively kill organs.

He adds, "Before planting, ensure to drain the soil with chemicals to kill any organs that may hinder germination of seeds. Use a watering can or spray pump of about 16litre for 30miles of planting area while applying pesticides on soil. For 10miles, you may need to reduce to 6litres that can accommodate the soil capacity." Vegetables are susceptible to pests says Mbusa and farmers ought to be vigilant in regards to pest management.

"Farmers should know how to control the pests and consult where need be. There is a recent challenge of fungi on tomatoes which can be remedied with systemic fungicide which is about Shs40, 000 per litre. This fungicide also works best on beans," he adds.

Watering

Watering should be a regular practice in early and late stages of vegetable growing. According to Nakiganda, irrigation for vegetables such as cabbages, tomatoes and onions should be on a small scale and planned by an irrigation engineer most preferably drip irrigation for saving water and one's time. "During the dry season, farmers ought to water their crops regularly about three times a day," she explains.

Harvesting

Different crops show different indices in maturity according to Mbusa. "For onions, one can spot dry leaves and purple buds as they emerge from the soil. When it comes to cabbage, one may attain the head to establish a good harvest period." Harvest he adds depends on the percentage of maturity in a field as if a farme attains most crops showing maturi signs; he or she is allowed to continu with harvesting. Mbusa advis farmers to store the harvests in w aerated rooms.

MARKETING

Marketing starts right from the time of managing the seedlings emphasises Nakiganda. She encourages farmers to plant tomatoes especially of the Nemonetta variety because of its high yields.

She says besides our local markets, ripe tomatoes and onions can be exported to neighbouring countries like South Sudan and Rwanda. A wholesale kilogramme of tomatoes costs Shs4, 000 while onions fetch Shs2, 000. A prominent vegetable farmer Julius Peter Ahagaana recently revealed he makes over Shs24m from tomato sales. Ahagana who is also an agronomist from Makerere University Agricultural Research Institute Kabanyolo (MUARIK) majors in growing Nemonetta tomato variety commonly grown in green houses.

QUALITY SEEDS

Nakiganda reveals she has been supplying quality seeds to farmers for the last five year. She says, "At Grow more seeds, we are driven by quality as we ensure that customers get value for their mone as our vegetable seeds cost about shs8, 000 for a tin of say onions. 25gramms and 50gramms of see cost about shs2, 000 to shs4, 0 depending on the type."

These quality seed products she says can be purchased at Contai village and Grow more seeds fac in Mukono-Mbalala.

Nakiganda advises farmers to look out for expiry dates as som unscrupulous people sell expire seeds to unsuspecting c

