

Urban farming will

By Joshua Kato

There is no space that is too small to use for farming. This was the main message preached to people who turned up for training in urban farming during the Harvest Money expo. Over 1,500 people attended the two training sessions on urban farming facilitated by Dr Diana Nambatya Nsubuga and Harriet Nakabaale.

The expo was organised by Vision Group and sponsored by the Embassy of the Netherlands, Operation Wealth Creation, Ofisa Bank, Engsol, Davis and Shirilift and Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries.

"A home vegetable garden turns a previously ornamental space into one of beauty with purpose and adds a healthy, sustainable new source of vegetables. Whether your yard is large or small, you can enjoy fresh home grown vegetables straight from your garden," Nakabaale, whose urban vegetable farm is now a tourism attraction says.

The two trainers listed enterprises like poultry, zero grazing, bananas, strawberries, watermelon and medicinal plants such as *munguwa*, rosemary, lemongrass that an urban farmer can practise in a small of space.

"Using my own domestic consumption as an example, I used to spend an average of sh20,000 on tomatoes weekly, but this stopped when I started growing them," Nambatya told the farmers during the training.

Lots of space

Nakabaale says when one takes a closer look at one's yard, one may be surprised at just how many places one can grow a vegetable.

If you have limited space, consider growing crops in plastic bags and flowerpots. These can be readily available from farm inputs dealers," Nakabaale says. A bag that can be used to grow about 40 heads of cabbage or tomatoes costs about sh10,000 each. This means that with just sh10,000, you will have created space for 40 plants.

"If you do not want to buy single planting bags, you can buy a large sack garden. A single sack garden can accommodate as many as 100 plants and yet it sits on just 5x3 feet.

"Home gardening can be fun and provide delicious and highly nutritious fresh food to your family," Nakabaale says.

Using these small gardens, one can teach one's little ones how to grow vegetables from an early age by turning gardening into a family activity like planting, watering and harvesting.



Nambatya training farmers in urban farming at the Harvest Money expo recently



Vegetables can be grown in improvised home products

Sh 10,000

COST of a bag that can be used to grow 40 cabbages or tomatoes

100

PLANTS accommodated in a sack garden

In addition to vegetables, one can also plant an orange tree on a mango tree. Each of these requires 3x5 feet of your space.

Preparation for planting

Before planting, select an appropriate site.

Prepare the soil by adding organic matter and maintaining soil fertility. A good gardening site should receive full sun for at least eight hours each day.

A person can observe this by simply following the movement of the sun. She says that it has to be relatively level and well-drained.

Find a reputable source of seeds. Many seed companies treat their seeds before sale.

This kills disease organisms in or on the seeds and prevents seed rot.

Seeds that have been treated will be labelled as such and are often brightly-coloured. Be sure to wash your hands after handling treated seeds.

For beginners, plant a sizeable garden you can easily maintain, as you learn to cope with the tasks required. Weeds and pests must be

do well in containers. Crops with many fruits per plant such as peppers, tomatoes and vegetables with roots such as onions, beetroot and are also good choices to grow in containers.

You can use containers made of clay, wood, or plastic for growing vegetables.

Also consider using barrels, flowerpots or window boxes. Unusual containers will add interest to your garden. These decorated to add more beauty.

Each container must have drainage holes at the bottom so the plant roots will not stand in water. If the container does not already have holes, make at least four to six holes 1/2 inch from the bottom in its sides using a small nail.

The container should be the proper size for the plants growing in it. For example, tomatoes, cabbages and eggplants need a container that is at least 1x1ft wide.

Some seeds are planted directly in containers where they will be growing. Others are set in as transplants. Pay particular attention to watering container vegetables.

Container soils can dry out quickly, especially on a concrete patio in full sun. Daily watering may be necessary in the morning and evening. However, do not go to extremes. The soil should not be made soggy or have water standing on top. Apply water until it runs out the drainage holes.

'Nakati' This is one of the most consumed leafy vegetables. At the moment, prices are fairly low because of the rainy season with a bundle going for sh1,000. However, come dry season, the situation will be different. This is why you should grow your own.

Nakati does not require a large space. In a space of 3x3ft, a homestead of four people can grow enough nakati to feed them for a month.

Small sachets of nakati seeds suitable for small farmers are sold at sh2,000.

Mangoes According to Lawrence Alisiku, a citrus farmer in Maracha, a single mango tree can produce enough fruits per season for a family of six.

"A single tree does not take a lot of space," he says. A grafted mango seedling costs between sh2,500 and sh4,000 in most nurseries. There are two seasons in a year.

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regularly with water to help the vegetables blossom. "Avoid using treated water as much as possible, however if you have to use it, do not pour it on the plants directly because it contains chlorine, a chemical that is not so good for crops," she says. She advises that you pour the water on the soil and not on the leaves.

save you money



Patrick Yiga, a farmer displays tomatoes grown in plastic bags. These can be consumed at home or sold for profit

Avoid using treated water as much as possible when watering plants

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If you can spare three square feet in your compound to plant mango trees, you will be looking forward to every season.

If you look after it well, regularly watering and spraying it against pests and diseases and adding fertilisers, you and your family will enjoy fresh mangoes every season.

A single mango tree takes up space of about three square feet. A little manure in the pit will make it grow faster.

There are mango varieties on the market that can give up to 500 fruits per year when mature.

A well-maintained grafted mango starts yielding fruit at nine months.

However, you need to keep removing these early fruits, until the tree develops a sizeable canopy that is strong enough to hold the fruits.

Oranges The oranges consumed by an average family in a year can be produced by a single tree.

All you have to do is find space for that orange tree in your compound and you will forget about buying them.

Some of the grafted varieties can produce between 500 and 1,000 oranges a year. An

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A single cow needs an acre of grass throughout the year. In addition to the milk, Nambatya said she also produces bio-gas that she uses to cook and light part of her house plus organic fertilisers and odour neutralisers that he sells to other farmers.

Invest in livestock

It is possible for an urban farmer to keep livestock. For example, a wooden structure of 10x10ft can keep as many as 20 chickens. These give not only eggs, but also meat. They also provide the organic fertilisers for the vegetables and other crops.

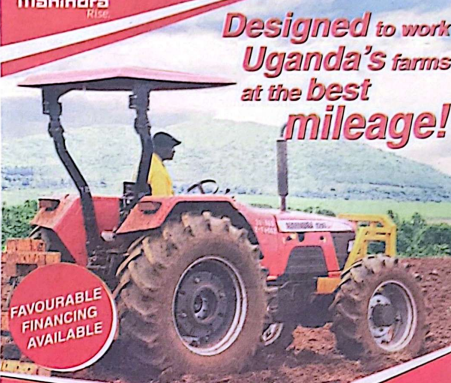


"When you keep chicken or any other livestock, the droppings help with the fertilisers needed to provide nutrients to the soils before and after planting," Nambatya said. The chicken can easily be fed on processed feeds.

For those with larger space of about 20x20ft, it is possible to keep a zero grazing cow for milk. The cow, if well-fed can produce at least 15 litres of milk per day. From these, you can consume two to three then sell the rest.

"However, you should have some other place where you grow grass for it to feed on," Nambatya advised.

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