

Having less or no land to farm in urban areas should not be an excuse ever again according to Dr Allan Ahimbisibwe. He tells *Seeds of Gold's* Denis Bbosa how he is helping many urban dwellers in setting up manageable backyard gardens downplaying the notion that having a garden is prerogative for the well-off.

**D**r Allan Ahimbisibwe, a youthful statistics graduate, is practicing his passion for smart farming to curb the challenges that many give as a reason to run away from agribusiness.

Through his Spark Agro Initiatives company based in Nansana, Ahimbisibwe is teaching various farmers how to use their compounds, regardless of the size, to grow spices and vegetables that are marketable and can be used for home consumption.

His meager demonstration farm has 50 bags and about 10 pots of sukumawiki, cabbages, strawberry and tomatoes that are still at infant stage.

"Urban farming is very easy even for lazy farmers. We went for vegetables, spices and herbs because they are not heavy feeder plants like a pumpkins or bananas. We plant them in these bags and within months we are yielding," Ahimbisibwe proudly shows off his well looked after project.

He urges Ugandans to open their eyes and start farming plants with short root systems such as sukumawiki, egg plants, tomatoes, straw berry, cabbages that are eaten every day and grown within three months.

"Most of the vegetables grow in two months, those with leaves grow in one month. We are preaching an idea of getting value from small place. At harvesting stage, which is soon by the way, I will be getting more than 50 plants a week," he says.

After his studies at Makerere University, Ahimbisibwe tried to a bank job but still his passion for agriculture drove him out to start this venture that has seen him start up over 60 backyard gardens for corporate and high end customers like affluent politicians. His catchment areas have spread from Kampala to Mbarara and Jinja of late.

**No regrets**

He says the benefits of home gardening are innumerable; first for health reasons and then fulfilling the World Health Organisation (WHO) directive that one must eat a fruit or vegetable 30 minutes from the garden.

"Money saved is money earned, if each week you save about Shs50,000 that you would have used to buy these vegetables, you would be better off," he advises.

The need to educate and attract the young people that often want to stay home into farming drives Ahimbisibwe when setting up these compound gardens.

Needless to say, even after substituting flowers, the vegetables, spices and herbs still offer beauty to homesteads.

**Economical start**

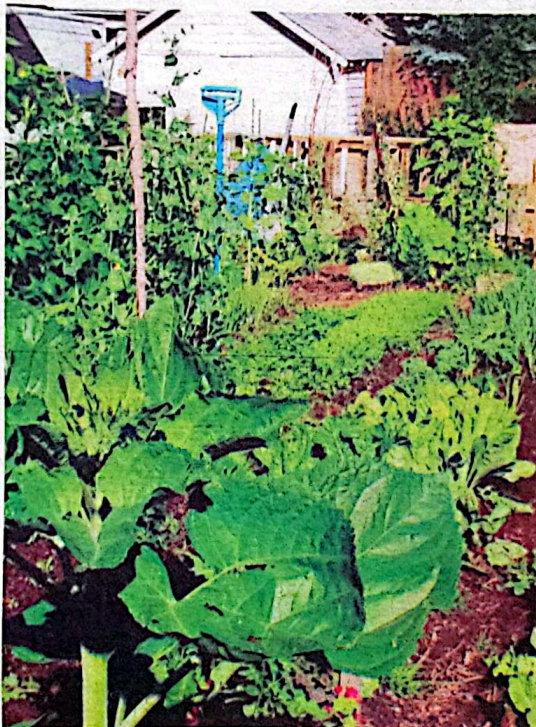
Ahimbisibwe invested just Shs40,000 to start up the demonstration garden but he hopes to reap more than Shs5m after two months. He has been doing this for the last one year spending most on bags (Shs7,000 each), manure and pots.

"The strawberry are expensive and



Dr Allan Ahimbisibwe displays sukumawiki on his backyard farm. Ahimbisibwe grows several vegetables including cabbage, and tomatoes. PHOTO BY DENIS BBOGA

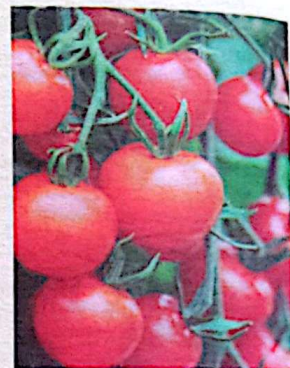
# Dr Ahimbisibwe harvests cash from urban farming



**MUST GROW CROPS**

He says if farmers can, they should rush to grow tomatoes, onions, cabbages in this rainy season because of their marketability, short production span. "Melons started with capital base of Shs2m on one acre can reap about 7000 pieces which translates in over Shs10m," he says. Since many Ugandans are small scale farmers ventures, Dr Ahimbisibwe advises those with land and capital not to forsake planting of bananas, cassava and coffee. His rapid success is attributed to the proper usage of social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp to touch the lives of thousands of craving prospective farmers.

He advises farmers to seek information before investing. He says, "Before you invest Shs1m, why not put Shs40,000 into consultancy and know the best farming practices and trends that will help you get high yields?"



passing day. On an average day, over 10 people pass by to get farming knowledge from him and his five employees.

They also offer advisory services for optimum utilization of land, draw business plans for production, management and marketing, applying best agronomic practices, feeding soils with fertilizers and adopting mixed farming.

After setting up a backyard garden in homes - Dr Ahimbisibwe and colleagues provide raw materials and keep on monitoring the project until the owners learn how to handle it.

He advises farmers to do research on how to farm short life cycle crops such as onions and watermelons because one acre can yield a farmer about Shs20m if they follow the right practices.

**5m**

**MONEY IN SHILLINGS DR AHIMBISIBWE EARNS PER MONTH.**

have high market demand which means I have to yield good money once they are harvested," he says.

His challenge now is getting a standard nursery bed to feed the demonstration farm because the client base is swelling every

