

BACKYARD FARMING

# Cages are good at economising backyard space

## How to grow plants in cages

BY RITAH MUKASA

Many people love growing creeping edible plants such as tomatoes in their backyard. And for support, they simply tie them to erected log as trellis. However, according to Drake Kizito, a gardener in Nsambya, a Kampala suburb, growing creepers in cages is more profitable than one may think.

When it comes to economising space, cages are unequalled as they maximise even the smallest backyards.

Since a plant is structurally supported, it will bear more fruit in a small space, hence achieving more yields.

"Cages help to keep the plants thriving. They also protect the fruit from pest damage commonly seen when plants are left to sprawl on the ground," he explains.

With a piece of wire mesh and a creative hand, you can make your own cost-friendly cages.

Leonard Muzahura, another gardener, adds that cages provide support for branches that are overwhelmed with the weight of fruits.

"You do not need to tie the plant since the bars of the cage support the stems," he notes.

### How to create cages

Muzahura says a well fixed cage can last for years. This means that it can support plants in all seasons throughout the year.

You can choose to plant the creepers in the ground or in pots of different sizes depending on the variety.

You can make a large cage that can support all the stems with heavy fruits.

"It can measure five feet, have a 10-gauge concrete reinforcement wire with wide openings up to 6-inches," he explains.

Cut a desirable length of the wire



When assembled well, cages can last many years

and coil it to make a circular cage of about 18 inches in diameter.

Cut off the bottom two levels of horizontal wire to create 'legs' which you can push into the ground to hold the tomato cage in place.

However, you can fasten the cage with more wire mesh for extra stability.

When cages are well anchored,

they support the weight of all the plants when laden with fruit.

In case you are planting tomatoes, put one inside the cage and keep pulling the stems through the wire as they grow for support.

Ensure that you space the cages so the plants do not compete for sunlight due to overcrowding.

Set them four feet apart,



Cages can add beauty to the compound

### EXPERT ADVICE: GROWING TOMATOES

Drake Kizito, a gardener, argues that any tomato grower, no matter the scale, should always first look out for seeds of a good variety.

"Sow them in a seed box or nursery bed. This helps to identify healthy or affected seedlings before transplanting," he explains.

However, before you settle for containers or pots to grow tomatoes, you should realise that these plants are heavy feeders and so, they need soil with heavy nutrient content.

"Make sure that the fertile soil mixture has good drainage. This is achieved by adding sand to the soil mixture in a ratio of 1:1:2," Kizito says. One spade of sand: One spade of manure

or composite: 2 spades of black soil. Also, if you chose to use containers, add stones or broken clay pots at the bottom of the container to let the water drain easily through the holes at the bottom of the planter.

After, add the mixture to the container and the desired tomatoes variety.

This is followed by placing wire mesh and some logs, sticks or iron bars to hold the mesh firm to support the weight of the tomato plant.

To give more support to a weak plant, fasten the stems on to the mesh using soft wires or gauze threads.

Finally, maintain the plant by removing all leaves growing near the soil level to avoid fungal infections.

depending on the size of your tomato. "Cages also work better in case you want to rotate plants," Muzahura says, adding that

creeping beans can be rotated with tomatoes and cucumbers.

This helps to avoid buildup of insects and diseases.



Cages are used alongside other methods like mulching

### REMEMBER TO...

Keep watering and spraying with organic pesticides as you wait to harvest. "Backyard gardeners should embrace cages because they help to prevent diseases, make harvesting easier, keep the fruit clean and allow easy monitoring. They are also decorative," Kizito states.