



## Growing Sweet Potatoes in a kitchen garden

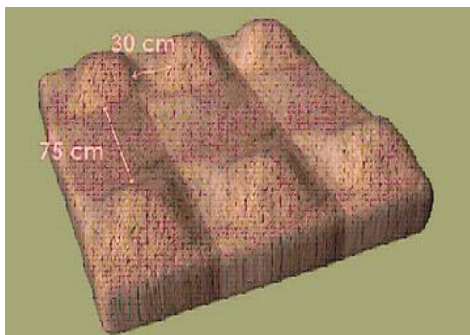
Sweet potatoes have a growing period of 3-6 months depending on the variety. They can be grown on ridges, mounds or on flat land.



Yellow-fleshed varieties are best as they have high vitamin A which increases resistance to some diseases.

### Land preparation

- Clear all the bushes and remove any crop residues in the farm. Plough the land and harrow to obtain a fine tilth.
- Spread and dig in well-rotten manure to improve the fertility of the soil and soil structure



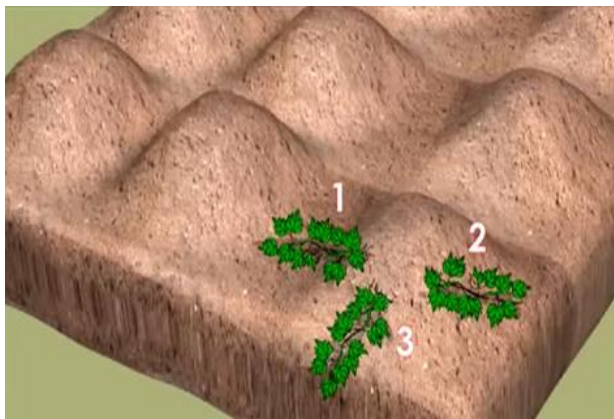
- Make mounds or ridges to plant your sweet potatoes. For mounds, space at 75cm by 30cm and ridges 75cm apart. Planting on flat land leads to low yield. Ridges are encouraged for tuber expansion, reducing soil erosion, conserving moisture, higher yields and one can do intercropping.



## 1. Planting

Sweet potatoes are planted from vines.

Select clean, healthy vines 25-30cm with 3 nodes. Longer vines result in wastage of planting material while shorter ones establish more slowly and give poorer yields.



- Plant 2-3 cuttings per mound or along ridges at a spacing of 75 cm by 30 cm, and 4-6 cm deep.
- Cover with soil  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the nodes and leave  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the vine above the soil
- Mulch with dry grass to help conserve moisture

## Management

- Ensure you keep the sweet potato field free from weeds. Weed your field in the first two months when the sweet potatoes are slow in growth.
- 1st weeding is done at 2-3 weeks of age, while the second at 5 weeks.
- After the second month, plant growth is vigorous enough to cover the surface and suppress weeds.
- However, some common weeds such as Black jack may continue to grow even after the second month and these should be removed by hand periodically until the crop is harvested.
- While weeding, earth up the hill of soil to encourage tuber expansion.



## Controlling pests and diseases

Most sweet potato varieties are fairly tolerant to pests and diseases.

### Pests

The main pest is the *Sweet Potato Weevil*. If not well managed, it can lead to reduced yields.



An adult fly feeds on leaves and stems causing thickening and cracking of the vines and feed on leaves. Larva bores into the storage roots producing a bitter substance. To control:

- Plant early
- Use clean and healthy planting material
- Do crop rotation
- Keep the field clean at all times.

### Diseases

The common disease is the *Sweet Potato Virus*. It is a disease spread by Aphids and Whiteflies. The signs include dwarfing of the plants, young leaves turning yellow and excessive branching. To control:

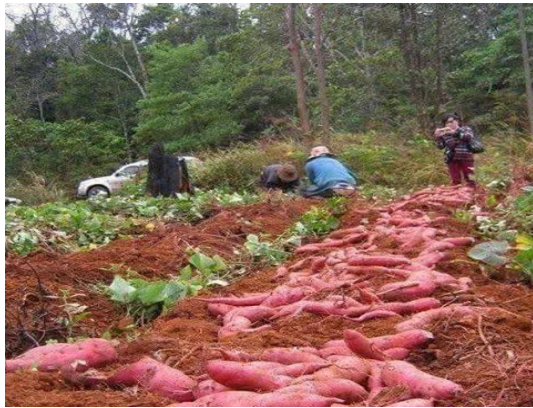
- Plant resistant or tolerant sweet potatoes varieties
- Use healthy, clean, virus free planting materials
- Good field sanitation.



## Harvesting

Depending on the variety and the region, sweet potatoes mature after 3-6 months.

At this time, the leaves start to turn yellow and dry up. Use a fork jembe to loosen the soil around the tubers and to lift tubers from the ground.



Young leaves can also be harvested for vegetable use 2 months after planting.