

Jute Mallow

Introduction

Jute mallow (*Corchorus olitorius*) is also called *tege*, *nalte jute*, *tossa jute*, and *corete potagere*. It performs best under warm and humid conditions and is therefore often grown on low-lying riverbanks to allow frequent watering. The crop can even be grown in swampy regions as long as the land is not under water. Well-drained soils with abundant water are ideal and most farmers plant the crop on raised beds of about 1.5 m wide x 10.0 m long. The average monocropped plot is about 300 m². During the rainy season, farmers usually grow jute mallow among other food crops. Jute mallow does not tolerate cold weather and extended periods of drought will kill the crop.

Seeds and sowing

Seed should be collected from yellow or brown pods and left to dry on a sheet. Seeds should not be sown within four months to avoid dormancy. If dormancy persists, heat treatment should be done by placing a cloth bag with seeds in hot, simmering water for 5–10 seconds after which the bag should be placed in cold water for 5–15 minutes. The seeds should then be placed on a dry cloth and allowed to dry in the shade for one day. Treated seeds should be sown immediately since they cannot be stored.

Seeds can be broadcast in seedbeds or sown along rows 15–20 cm wide. Closely planted seedlings are susceptible to diseases. Strong plants can be obtained when the seedlings are thinned to 1–2 cm spacing. The seedlings should be transplanted when they are about 7–10 cm tall, as older plants will not settle well. Spacing for tall varieties with few side shoots, like Ewondo or Géant de Bertoua, is 10 cm in the row by 30–50 cm between rows. Alternate plants can be pulled out during the first harvest, thus leaving a space within the rows of 20 cm. Broad varieties with many side shoots require a spacing of 30 x 50 cm; these varieties may grow as volunteer crops during the rainy season or are sown directly.



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Crop management

Jute mallow responds well to manure. Apply 1.5–2.0 kg of dried chicken manure (or well-decomposed cattle or goat manure) plus 100 gram of ash per m² bed. When manure is not available, apply 15-15-15 fertilizer at a rate of 25 gram per m². Plant the crop on beds at an interval of two weeks to spread the marketing period and reduce the risk of no sale during periods of over-supply. Plants can be topped to give stronger side shoots. Frequent irrigation is needed for a good yield. Pests and diseases are rarely a significant problem.

Harvesting and postharvest

Subsistence farmers usually harvest fresh shoots and allow new side shoots to develop. The first harvest consists of thinned plants with their roots attached. The next harvest will be tops picked at 15 cm above ground. New side shoots will develop and harvest can be repeated three or four times, depending on soil fertility and irrigation. More frequent and intense plucking of leaves may prolong the vegetative phase. Jute mallow perishes quickly after harvest. The produce should be wrapped in a wet cloth, leaving plenty of room for aeration. Ensure that the cloth remains moist. Water may be sprinkled on heaps of produce but not too often since this will stimulate rotting.

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