

## *La Morelle Noire*

### **Introduction**

African nightshades can be found throughout Africa. There are several wild species with black berries, but the most popular cultivated species in West Africa have dark purple berries and belong to *Solanum scabrum*. Common names of this species include *bitossa*, *jamajama*, and *zom*. This group of species is often erroneously referred to as *Solanum nigrum*, a poisonous plant from Europe that is not usually grown in Africa. African nightshades can grow on a wide range of soil types but do not tolerate drought.



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### **Seeds and Sowing**

The soil in the nursery should be loosened and enriched with decomposed manure. Seeds should be mixed with sand and/or ash for uniform sowing. Sow the mixture thinly, either by broadcasting or in rows, 15-20 cm apart and cover with a fine layer of soil. After sowing, the bed should be mulched with tall grass or a similar material to retain moisture. This mulch can be removed once the plants are 3 cm. Transplant when seedlings have 6 true leaves and are 10-15 cm tall. Space plants 20x20 cm during the dry season, and 20x50 cm during the rainy season to reduce diseases. Spacing should be wider for large-leaved varieties like *Foumbom*.

### **Crop Management**

Nightshades require large amounts of nutrients, and therefore do well in soils that are rich in organic matter. They also grow well on land covered with ash from recently burned vegetation. Farmers generally use 20-10-10 NPK, urea, or sulphate of ammonia when there is no manure available. Sidedressing is practiced after every second harvest. However, excessive applications of nitrogen can lead to foliar diseases as well as a build-up of nitrites, which could become a human health risk.

Frequent irrigation is needed for good yields. Aphids are a major pest, causing leaves to curl and become unattractive to customers. Diseases are similar to those of potatoes and tomatoes, thus rotating with other crops such as amaranth is essential.

### **Harvesting and Postharvest**

The first harvest will be 5 weeks after transplanting. The stems can be cut about 10 cm from the ground, so that new side shoots develop. Pickings at weekly intervals will allow 6 harvests per plant (more if plants are sidedressed). If complete harvesting is practiced, spacing can be as close as 10x10 cm and plants are uprooted. This method is mainly used when there is less than 2 months before the main staple-food crop will be planted. Roots of these crops can be kept in water to keep the plants fresh.

Picking should be done early in the morning and the produce sold the same day. Alternatively, the crop can be harvested late in the afternoon and placed on plastic sheets or banana leaves. The produce should be tied in small bundles and the flowers removed before it is taken to market. Keep the bundles upright and water them sparingly to retain freshness. The yield can be 40 tons per hectare.

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