



Garden Eggs

Introduction

Garden eggs (*Solanaceous aethiopicum* L.) is also known as *African eggplant*, *mock tomato*, *ngogwe* or *nyanya chungu*. The crop appreciates the warm, non-humid conditions found throughout the savannah belt of West and East Africa. The optimal temperature for the crop is 23-35°C during days and 18-25°C during nights. It can grow on a wide range of well-drained soils. The optimum pH of the soil is between 5.5 and 6.8.

Sowing

Sow seeds in nursery beds along lines spaced 20 cm apart and cover with a thin layer of soil. Seedlings should be thinned to 2 cm apart to avoid spindly plants. After about 5 weeks when the plants are 15 cm high, they are ready for transplanting. Seedlings should be watered well before uprooting and again immediately after transplanting. The spacing is usually 75x75 cm or 60x90 cm.

Crop Management

A fertile soil is needed for good yields. Incorporate 5 tons of well-decomposed manure per 1000 m² prior to planting. Supplementary fertilization with 25 kg of 15-15-15 compound fertilizer per 1000 m² two weeks after transplanting is desirable. A further 10 kg of fertilizer should be applied at the flowering stage. This application should be repeated after the first harvest.

Mulching is recommended during the dry season to keep the soil moist. Do not place the mulch (usually grass) too close to the stem as it might cause collar rot.

Irrigation is most critical during the flowering and fruit setting stages. Sandy soils with limited organic matter should be irrigated 3 times per week whereas



for loamy soils with organic matter, twice a week is generally adequate. Pests and diseases are rarely problematic.

Harvesting and Postharvest

For most varieties, farmers should harvest the fruit before the skin becomes tough and changes color. The exceptions are those varieties that are consumed fresh for the sweet fruit. The fruit should be cut off with a knife or pruning scissors to prevent damage to the plant.

Harvesting should be regular even when there is no market for the fruit, as it is needed to encourage subsequent fruit development. If fruits are left on the plants, seeds will develop and few new fruit will be formed. During warm weather it is advisable to harvest very early in the morning or towards the evening. Keep the produce in a cool, shaded place.