

COWPEAS (NYEMBA) GROWERS GUIDE

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Introduction

Cowpeas are an ideal dryland crop (pulse) in low rainfall areas because they are drought resistant and provide excellent human nutrition and good rotational benefits. They are also an intercropping crop under maize.

Soils.

Cowpeas may be grown on a wide range of soils, but they are somewhat sensitive to acid soils. Cowpeas are legumes and may be grown on their own (sole cropping) or inter-cropped with maize. It is important to grow cowpeas in rotation with other crops in order to help control diseases.

Varieties.

There are two basic types of cowpeas: upright, bunch types, used mainly for grain production; and spreading types, which may be used for grain, vegetable or fodder. Improved cultivars, e.g., IT18, are ideal for grain production, and mature quickly. Purchase fresh seed regularly to avoid build up of seed borne diseases.

Planting and crop establishment.

Plant cowpeas anytime from the first rains until the end of December. In high rainfall areas, plant cowpeas late to avoid diseases when the crop reaches maturity. When grown on their own, the following plant populations should be achieved: Spreading types: 60 000 plants per ha (12 to 15 kg seed per ha). Upright, bunch types: 120 000 plants per ha (30 to 50 kg seed per ha).

The row width may be 45 to 90 cm. Closer rows may be used for upright, bunch types, while wider rows may be used for spreading types.

Cropping system	Plant type	Spacing (cm)	Seed rate (kg/Ha)	Populations
Sole crop	Bushy	45 x 15	40-50	150 000
	Spreading	75 x 20	20-25	67 000
Intercropping	Bushy	180 x 15	10-15	37 000

	Spreading	180 x 30	5-10	18 500
Planting depth= 5-7cm				

Fertilisation.

Cowpeas will respond to manure or low rates (100 to 200 kg per ha) of a compound fertiliser. (E.g 7.14.7).

Diseases.

Cowpeas are susceptible to a wide range of diseases. Virus diseases may be devastating. The best control measure is through the use of virus-free seed produced under strict roguing production systems (i.e., removing and destroying any plants showing virus disease symptoms).

Pests.

Pests include Aphids, Heliothis bollworm, CMR beetle and Tip-wilter. After harvest, the seed is susceptible to bruchids, a grain borer. These pests may be controlled with appropriate chemicals.