



A typical set up of circular garden also known as cake garden with assorted vegetable varieties with onions in the outer ring to repel insects. PHOTO/COURTESY

Kitchen gardening can improve food security

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LOMINDA AFEDRARU

Food insecurity, poverty, environmental degradation and climate change are some of the challenges facing the world today.

In Uganda, poverty and food insecurity have been on the increase since early 2000s due to high food prices.

According to a recent report by the Ministry of Agriculture, despite a widely held view of food self-sufficiency and abundant natural resources to produce adequate food, current trends indicate that many households and specific segments of Uganda's population suffer from food insecurity and high levels of malnutrition.

It is for such reasons that experts are pushing for backyard gardens - also referred to as kitchen gardens - which are

known to contribute to food security in many parts of the world especially where land is scarce and meaningful employment is not readily available.

Though this kind of agriculture contributes less to national production, in Uganda it contributes about 25 percent to household economic well-being of the people in the cities and the surrounding areas.

As such, scientists from Mukono Zonal Agricultural and Development Research Institute (Mukono ZARDI) have taken the lead in sensitising urban dwellers and schools in adopting kitchen gardening.

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Ms Mary Nampera, a senior communications officer at Mukono Zardi, notes that there are various forms of kitchen garden-

ing farmers can adopt.

These include container, vertical, raised bed, traditional ground plots and the recent being 'circular ring' also known as 'cake garden'.

Here, steps are constructed in circles and various vegetable varieties planted in each ring.

Ms Nampera noted that farmers can use available material such as concrete construction material, empty water bottles and used vehicle tyres among others - to set up their cake farm.

"Instead of levelling home compounds with concrete designs, set up a cake garden which can also act as a centre of agro-tourism. It will be a source of food security and income earning initiative," she notes.

According to Ms Nampera, a farmer can decide on how many rings to set up depending on the types of vegetables to grow.

"The most important thing is to ensure that all other varieties are in the inner circle with insect repellent varieties such as onions planted in the outer ring to protect other plants from insect infestation," she says.

STRUCTURE SETTING

To set up kitchen garden structure, farmers must first plan the garden by making a list of the vegetables they want to grow.

Some plants keep providing food for the whole season, so you only need a few plants.

Choose one vegetable from each of the groups listed and divide your garden into four sections. Plant each of these vegetables in its own space:

Plants grown for their leaves or flowers, such as lettuce, cabbage, spinach, broccoli and plants grown for their fruits, such as tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumber, potatoes

Plants grown for their roots such as carrots, beetroot, onions and legume plants grown for their seeds such as beans, peas, peanuts.

This idea is based on plants that are friendly towards each other.

It also allows for crop rotation each year. This makes it easier to manage pests, avoid the spread of plant diseases, feed the soil and bear the best crop.

Good companion plants - Beetroots, cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes and spring onions - do not compete for root space, light and nutrients. Herbs make good companions because their scent, shape and taste prevent pests from eating their neighbouring plants.

Importance kitchen garden

Ian Benywanira, a research scientist at Mukono Zardi, explained that it is important for farmers to understand kitchen gardening and its importance before setting up a structure.

"Growing your own veggies and herbs means fresh produce right at your doorstep. For urban farmers, it's a reliable source of nutritious food, reducing reliance on markets," he says.

"Kitchen gardens often use organic methods, promoting healthier plants and reducing chemical use. This leads to production of clean and safe vegetables where techniques such as crop rotation and companion planting help manage pests naturally," Mr Benywanira says.

It also helps to keep children at home occupied.

As part of Climate Smart Agriculture practice, cake gardens promotes efficient water usage, reduction in agriculture chemical usage, encourages recycling of bio-degradable residues at home, reduces carbon footprint and increases resilience to climate changes.