

GOOD GARDENING AND GROWING ROOT AND GRAIN CROPS IN CAMBODIA

*PRACTICAL WAYS OF GROWING LOCAL
FOOD PLANTS AND DOING IT WELL*



FOOD PLANT SOLUTIONS
ROTARY ACTION GROUP
Solutions to Malnutrition and Food Security



A project of the Rotary Club of Devonport North and District 9830

Good gardening and growing root and grain crops in Cambodia



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Food Plant Solutions produces educational materials to enable people to understand the nutritional value of local food plants and increase awareness of highly nutritious plants that are adapted to the local environment. Some of these plants are under-utilised species and many are superior to imported foods and plants. Food Plant Solutions produces these materials because every minute of every day, five children under the age of five die from malnutrition.

We welcome and encourage your support.

Food Plant Solutions - A project of the Rotary Club of Devonport North & Rotary District 9830.

This booklet is based on information from the Food Plants International (FPI) database developed by Tasmanian agricultural scientist Bruce French, AO.

Version 1, Mar 2025 (English)

Good nutrition is simple

Grow and eat a wide range of food plants.

Then if a nutrient is missing from one plant, it will be included in other plants and produce a balanced diet.

Mangosteen



Sweet potato

Healthy Diets

All people, and especially children, should eat a wide range of food plants to stay healthy. This should include some plants from each of the food groups – energy foods, growth foods and health foods. Then each of the nutrients required by our bodies will be met in a balanced manner.



Local plants give a regular food supply

Use a range of local or well adapted plants to get a regular supply of food.

Because they are local, they will have already survived local conditions and pests.



They each have different ways to survive poor conditions or seasons.



Agroecology - growing plants a natural way



Growing foods in a mixed garden is a good and simple way to reduce pests and disease.



Agroecology - how plants grow in nature

Plants don't grow in rows in nature.

Growing only one type of plant is not used in nature.

Lots of varieties are maintained in nature.

In nature, the right plant grows in the right place.

In nature, fruit is produced in season.

Nutrients are recycled in nature.

Natural systems are sustainable.

In nature, the soil remains alive and humus rich.

Mixed cropping is good

Amaranth and maize mixed.



Yams, bananas & vegetables.

Information on gardening



Deficiencies



Pests



Seed-saving



Diseases

Are your plants healthy?

Plants show special signs when they are not growing well.

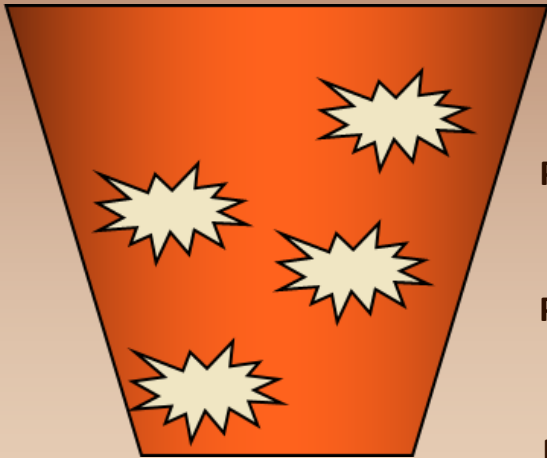
This maize leaf is indicating the plant is short of a nutrient called nitrogen. It shows a dry 'V' shape down the centre of the oldest leaves. Other grass plants show similar signs.

Nitrogen is in the air, but plants cannot use it unless small bacteria in the soil, and on the roots of bean family plants, change it into a form plants can use.



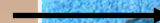
A bucket of nutrients!

If we imagine soil as being like a bucket of nutrients, then we need to fix the lowest hole, (or add the nutrient which is in shortest supply), before the bucket can carry anything more.



We can learn to recognize which nutrients are in shortest supply by looking at plants carefully.

Phosphorus



Potash



Nitrogen



Different plants grow on different soils



**Yams need
fertile soil**



**Taros need
good soil**



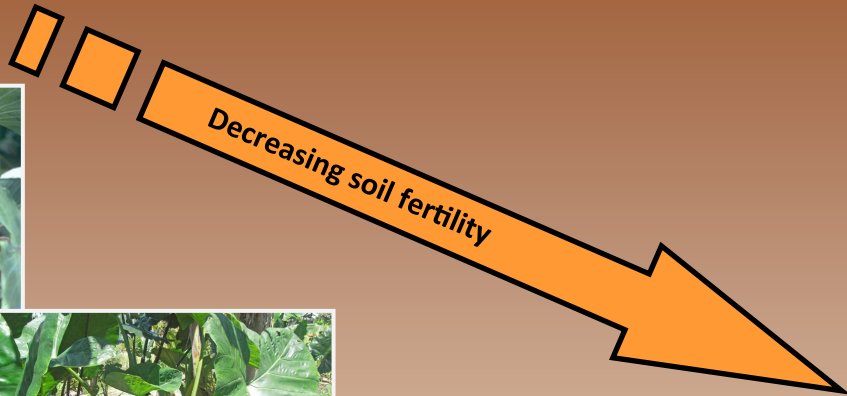
**Chinese taro can grow
on moderate soils**



**Sweet potato
grows on poorer
soils**



**Cassava will
produce on
poor soils**



When nitrogen is short...

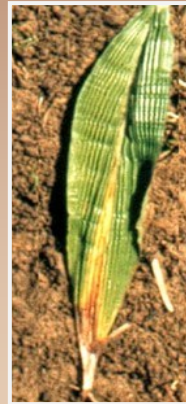


**Pineapple plants
turn red.**

**Nitrogen is important for plants to grow
healthy leaves.**



**Grass plants have a dead 'V'
shape in the old leaves.**



**Old leaves go
yellow.**

Beans provide protein and restore soils

Beans have special bacteria attached to their roots that allow them to take nitrogen from the air and put it into the soil for plants to use. It is free fertiliser!



Climbing beans can be allowed to climb up corn in gardens and still get good crops of both beans and corn.

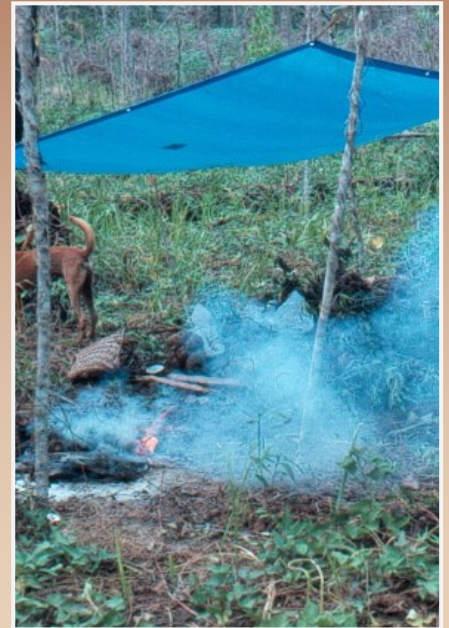
Burning loses nutrients and destroys soils

Burning is a quick and easy way to clear up a garden site, but wherever possible, plant material should be left to rot back into the soil.

This provides nutrients and helps the bacteria and other living things in the soil that are so important for plant growth.

A soil with humus, or rotted plant material, does not lose nutrients during heavy rain.

Nitrogen (and Sulphur) get lost into the air as plant material is burnt. Other plant nutrients, like potash, remain in the ashes.



Making compost



Don't burn rubbish - compost it!

**Compost is perfect for small
backyard gardens.**



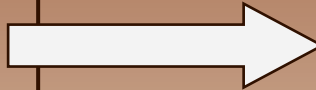
How to make compost

The rules for compost making:

- Build a simple, open box to keep animals out.
- Add some old rotting material to start the process.
- Mix green leafy and dry plant material.
- Allow air to get into the compost.
- Keep the compost bed moist.
- Add anything that has been living before.
- If possible, turn the heap to allow it to heat up and break down properly.

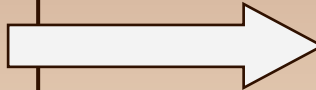
The reasons for compost

Small bacteria and other living things work hard to break down old plants and other living things into compost.



Because the bacteria are living, they need continual air and water, and a balanced diet of green and dry waste, or they die.

Living things already have plant nutrients in perfect balance for new plant growth, so compost is the perfect fertiliser.



To stay healthy, soil needs lots of compost and organic matter to do all the amazing work that goes on unseen within the soil.

Compost should become hot enough to kill weeds and pests.

Air-layering

Air-layering is a special way of taking cuttings. A shallow cut is made around a small branch while it is still on the tree. Some soil and mulch is wrapped around this and covered with plastic. It soon forms roots. It can then be cut off and planted.



If a sweeter or preferred fruit or nut is found, it is best to grow it from cuttings, or air-layering, so the new tree is the same as the old.

Save your own seed

Plants grown from seed that is saved locally usually get a lot less disease, as they are adapted to the area.



Some diseases tell a story

The first rule in managing pests and diseases is to grow the right plant in the right place, and to grow it well, so it can stay healthy.

Peanut rust



Leaf spot in bananas



Some diseases tell a story

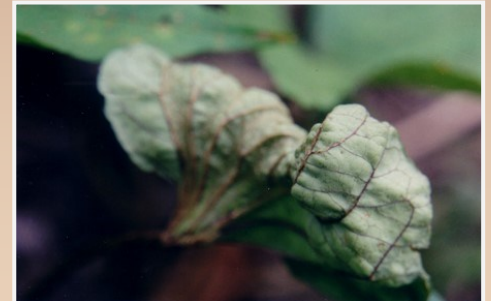
Elsinoe scab on sweet potato usually tells us three things:

- **The soil is getting poor and low in nutrients.**
- **The sweet potato is a variety that gets the disease more easily.**
- **The variety of sweet potato may have come from another country without the disease, so it has no resistance.**



Reduce the risk by:

- **Improving the soil.**
- **Choose a local, resistant variety.**



Banana diseases

Black spot



Several different fungi cause leaf spots on banana leaves, especially in wet seasons.

Sigatoka leaf spot



Banana rust



Choose banana varieties that show less of these diseases.

Diamond leaf spot



Banana pests

Using a range of crops and a mix of varieties are normally good safeguards against insect pest damage.



Banana insect pests



Banana weevil borer can dig into the roots of banana plants causing them to fall over.

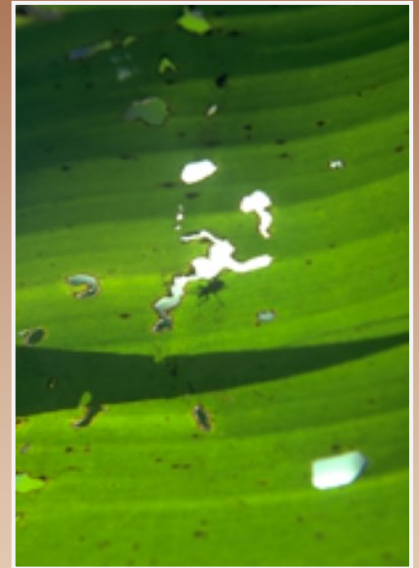
Banana insect pests

Several caterpillars, grasshoppers and weevils chew banana leaves.

Grow plants well so that new leaves grow quickly.



Some rhinoceros beetles can dig into banana stems and roots and make plants weak.



Taro diseases

Use a mix of varieties and mixed cropping to reduce damage.



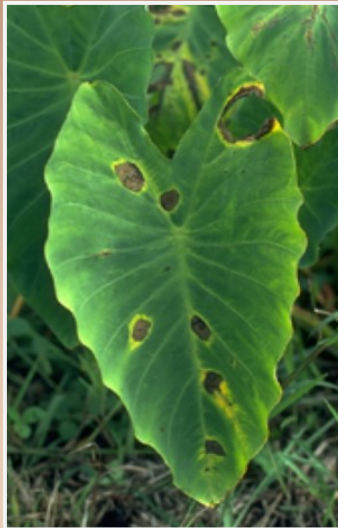
Taro blight is a devastating fungal disease. The fungus washes in the rain on hot, wet nights.

Taro diseases

Taro mosaic virus



**Taro shot hole - a
minor fungal
disease**



**Taro diffuse
yellow leaf spot**

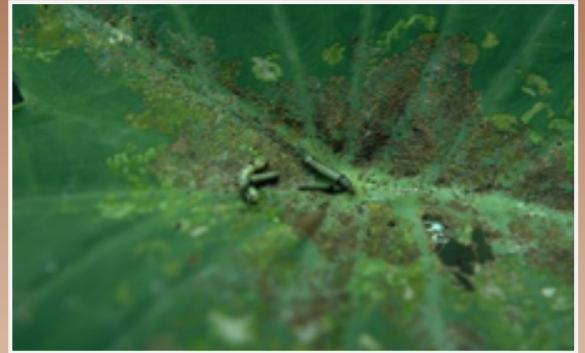


Taro insect pests

White fly



Cluster caterpillar



Taro insect pests

Aphids sucking sap



Taro hawkmoth



Grasshopper nymphs



Sweet potato diseases

Wrinkled sweet potato leaves.

Elsinoe fungus gets bad when soils are poor, and also occurs on varieties that are not resistant.



Yam diseases

Yam anthracnose – leaves can turn black and die early due to a fungus that gets worse in older plants, in wet seasons, and when plants get damaged.



Yam diseases

A virus-affected yam with small yellow leaves. Diseased plants should not be used for planting material.



This obvious leaf spot due to a fungus does not cause serious damage if plants are growing well.

Some problems with cassava

Older leaves going yellow means the soil is short of nitrogen.



Like most root crops, cassava produces more food if the soils are rich in potash. Ashes from fires have potash.

Leaves often get brown spots due to a fungus. It does not normally get too bad in good soils.



Young leaves turn yellow when the soil is sour - e.g. in limestone and coral sites.



Root and grain crops in Cambodia

Many root and grain crops
suit the climate of
Cambodia.

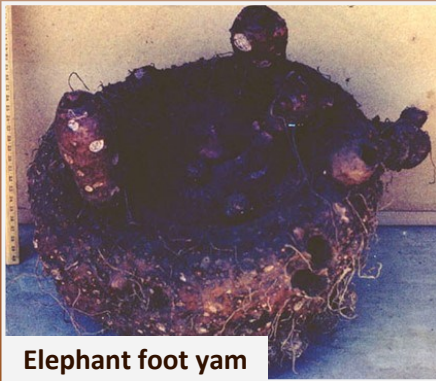
These foods are the
backbone of the country, so
we need to get to know
them very well.



Taro



Rice



Elephant foot yam

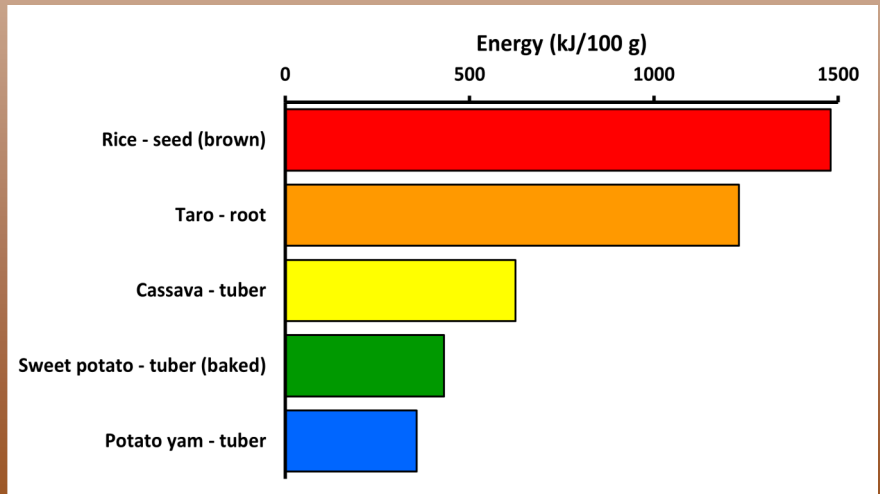


Sweet potato

Root and grain crops provide energy



Root and grain crops are important foods for energy.



Growing taro

- Taro grows best from the top of larger corms.
- It can grow in moving water and light shade.
- It takes 6-9 months to be ready to eat.



Growing sweet potato

Sweet potato needs:

- Air in the soil. Plant them in mounds if the soil is wet or clay.
- A soil rich in nutrients, particularly potash (ashes).
- A position in full sun.



There are many different types of sweet potato. Some grow quickly, but only give small amounts of food. Grow a mixture to make meals more interesting.

Growing yams

- Yams should be planted into a loose, friable, fertile soil.
- They need plenty of sun.
- They should have strong stakes about 2 m tall.
- A large section of the top of the old yam tuber is the best planting material.
- Yam tops are normally stored in a cool, dry place until they develop shoots.



Planting tops

A well staked yam



Growing cassava

Cassava is a root crop that is easy to grow, can be stored in the ground, will grow in poor soils and survive dry times.

Plant woody sections of the stem (about 15 cm long) in the ground at any angle.

If the soil is loose, it does not have to be dug first. Crops are usually harvested 10 - 14 months after planting. Yields of roots are lower in very acid soils and in shady places.



Cassava should always be well cooked as it contains a bitter poison called cyanide that can build up in the body and damage nerves. Cooking removes this.

Leaves can be cooked and eaten.



Rice

- Grains are boiled and eaten after husks removed.
- Plants are grown from seed.
- Flooding can be used for weed control.



Acknowledgements



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Images used in this publication are from the Food Plants International database ([Welcome - Food Plants International](#)).

For further details contact us at: info@foodplantsolutions.org, website: www.foodplantsolutions.org

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Notes



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