Cocoa Farming / Cocoa Cultivation | Complete Guide | Cocoa Beans Sowing – Cocoa Harvesting

Cocoa is mainly grown for its beans from which cocoa solids and butter are extracted. Cocoa beans are mainly used in the production of chocolate, cocoa powder and cocoa butter. Cocoa butter is used in the cosmetic industry.

Some of the varieties of cocoa beans include; Criollo, Forastero and Trinitano. Forasteno does well in Indian agro-climatic conditions. Cocoa is a perennial crop and is cultivated at altitude of up to 1150m above sea level and an annual rainfall of 1000-2000 mm. Cocoa trees can be grown in a wild range of soils however, they prefer well drained sandy loam soils with a pH range of 6.5-7. Water retaining soils are the best for its optimum growth and yield.

Land preparation

Plough the land 3-4 times until the soil attains fine tilt in such a way that the water should be drained quickly. When growing on a large scale it is advisable to go for a soil test. Basing on the results, supplement the soil with required nutrients.

Propagation of cocoa is done through seeds, vegetative cuttings, budding or grafting. In seed propagation, seeds should be treated with ash or lime. Sow cocoa seeds in polythene bags or raise the seeds in nursing bags with required shade. Cocoa is a shade loving plant hence an artificial shade should be created during its seedling and growing period.

Seedlings are ready to transplant in the main field when the height is 60 cm and cuttings of 3-4 cm long with 1 or 2 leaves.

Planting and pruning

Select vigorous and healthy seedlings from certified nurseries which are at least 4-5 months old and properly irrigate the cocoa plants to ensure healthy growth and yield. Maintain constant moisture as cocoa plants are sensitive to drought.

Cocoa plants respond well to organic manure and fertilizers. Each cocoa plant requires 8-10 Kg of well rotten farm manure.

Prune the cocoa plant twice in a year to encourage a tree structure. Carry out the first pruning after the main harvest and the second pruning six months after the first one. Limit the branches to 4-5 for better sunlight.

Harvesting

Cocoa starts flowering from the third year of planting and yields in the fifth year. Cocoa pods mature in about 5-6 months when the green pods turn to yellow. Open the pods by hitting on a hard surface or mallet then ferment and dry the beans.

Contact local market, domestic food processing industries or the cosmetic industry for bulk marketing.

Pests that affect cocoa plants include mealy bugs, aphids, plant hoppers, caterpillars, mosquitoes cocoa pod borer and stem girdlers. Diseases include cocoa swollen shoot, seedling blight, witches broom, black pod, frosty pod, stem canker and wilt.