How To Harvest And Store Sheabutter

The quality of shea butter depends on the quality of the shea fruits and nuts used. Handling shea fruits carefully is crucial to obtain high-quality kernels, ensuring a good price and grade for the resulting shea butter.

Collecting germinated or immature nuts can contaminate the kernels, resulting in poor-quality shea butter with a bitter taste and potential irritants. Some shea nut harvesters use pits to ferment shea fruits, which can make it easier to separate the nut from the fruit. However, heaping shea fruits can cause the kernels to germinate, rendering them unsuitable for shea butter production. Additionally, piled nuts can ferment, turning the kernels brown and spoiling their quality. Shea butter is extracted from the kernel, the innermost part of the shea fruit.

To ensure good-quality shea butter, it’s essential to handle shea fruits carefully to obtain high-quality kernels at a good price and grade.

Harvesting and Storage:

1. To obtain the best-grade kernels, collect only fully matured fruits that have fallen to the ground and have a soft texture. Taste the fruit, and if it’s sweet, it’s time to start harvesting.
2. Remove the nuts from the fruit immediately after collection to prevent fermentation.
3. Dry the nuts in the sun for 3-5 days on clean tarpaulin or mats. As the nuts dry, the kernels will shrink, and properly dried nuts will produce a rattling sound when shaken.
4. Shell the nuts immediately after they are dry to prevent

them from becoming damp again. Carefully remove the outer shell by striking the nut with a stone or a piece of wood, taking care not to crush the kernel.

5. After shelling, sort the kernels into grades: Grade A, which are light brown, not crushed, and suitable for shea butter processing; Grade B, which are not crushed but dull brown in color; Grade C, including discolored and crushed kernels; and Grade F, consisting of rejects, including germinated kernels and those with mold.
6. Pack the kernels in bags, filling them halfway, and lay them flat to prevent overheating, which can lead to mold growth. Keep the bags off the ground to prevent dampening.