Weeds are plants that grow where they are not needed. They compete with crops for nutrients, space, water and light, which often leads to poor growth and yield of the crop. They also serve as alternate hosts for pests and diseases.

The initial growth rate of cassava is very slow. This, together with the wide spacing between stakes, provide suitable conditions for weed establishment and growth. In cassava production, weed management is critical during the first 3 to 4 months of the crop. Thereafter, the crop canopy covers the ground and prevents weed growth.

Weed management is critical during the first 3 to 4 months of the cassava crop.

It is best to adopt an Integrated Weed Management Strategy to effectively control weeds in your field.

The selected control method will be influenced by the growth habits of the weeds, the size of the field and cost of labour.

When applying a broad leaf herbicide or broad-spectrum herbicide to control weeds in your cassava field always place a shield over the nozzle of the spray can.
Adopting an Integrated Weed Management Strategy

With an integrated weed management strategy, you make use of multiple methods to effectively control weeds. These include manual, mechanical, chemical and cultural methods. If using chemical control methods, please ensure proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is used at all times.

Some basic strategies to effectively control weeds are:

- Always practice good sanitation. Ensure all clothing, machines, tools and equipment are cleaned and free of soil and debris. Weed seeds attach to these surfaces and as a result are easily transferred from field to field, and from one part of the field to another.

- Always remove weeds before they start to flower and produce seeds. This practice prevents the weed population from becoming uncontrollable.

- Understand the life cycle and reproductive habit of the weeds. Some weeds such as water grass (*Commelina* spp.) and pig weed (*Purslane*) grow vegetatively (from pieces). If a weed whacker is used to control these weeds, then do not leave cut pieces in the field, since these can give rise to many more weed plants.

### Weed management strategies

#### Pre-planting

A good practice is to leave the soil exposed after ploughing and allow weed seeds to germinate. These can then be removed by physical (hand pulling and hoeing) or via chemical means. A broad-spectrum herbicide can also be effective.

Sometimes you can apply a pre-emergent herbicide prior to planting. This will prevent weed seeds already present in the soil from emerging or at least reduce their growth (FAO 2013).

#### Post-planting

After planting, farmers should monitor their fields and actively remove weeds. It is recommended that weed management continues until the crop becomes more competitive than the weeds.

If there is a weed problem at harvest time but the crop is thriving, weed management can be a waste of time and money.

In small-scale production systems, farmers can remove weeds by hand pulling, hoeing and with the use of a weed whacker.

The selected method would be influenced by the growth habit of the weed. Hand pulling and hoeing are the most common methods when the weed population is low and labour is cheap.

In large-scale production systems, and when labour is expensive, chemical control may be best. However, care must be taken because incorrect use can be harmful to the farmer, the crop and the environment.

Cassava is a broad leaf crop and during crop growth, depending on the type of weeds in the field, you may have to use a selective or broad-spectrum herbicide. When a broad leaf herbicide or broad-spectrum herbicide is being used, always place a shield over the nozzle of the spray can. This will prevent the chemical from drifting onto the crop.

Always use chemicals under the guidance of your Plant Protection Officer or Extension Officer.

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**References**


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