Soils

The best soils for growing cassava are sandy or clay loam soils. The crop will grow within a pH range of 4.6 to 8, but a pH of 5.5 to 7.5 is best. You must avoid waterlogged soils. Prior to crop establishment, do a soil test, as this will provide results upon which a realistic soil fertility maintenance programme can be developed. Soil testing is particularly important when the soil is acidic, as it is necessary to ameliorate the soil with limestone. This increases the soil’s pH and it is recommended that the application be done between 3 months and 2 weeks prior to planting.
Site Clearing
You should clear the site selected for planting of unwanted vegetation. The type of vegetation present will determine the method you use to clear the land. If there are large trees and woody shrubs on the land you will have to cut down and remove them from the field. You should also remove the roots of these plants from the land. For small plots (1/4 acre or less), manual land clearing can be done using brush cutters, lawn mowers or a cutlass.

You can use an approved contact or systemic herbicide to kill weeds and grasses. Later, you can apply an approved pre-emergent herbicide just prior to planting to kill germinating weed seeds. Remember always use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when handling chemicals.

In an environment-friendly production system, unwanted vegetation should be managed without the use of herbicides or burning.

Ploughing
Where permissible, you can do ploughing and ridging mechanically. This would involve using a motorized tiller or tractor drawn instruments to plough the soil and to form ridges.

For small scale operations, you can use a hand fork to break up the soil.

Ploughing breaks up the soil clods and exposes insect larvae and pupae, nematodes and weed seeds to the sun. The sanitising effect of the sun's rays will reduce pest, weed and disease pressures on the soon to-be-established crop. Ploughing also brings nutrients isolated in lower soil horizons higher up to the plant root zone.

You must plough deep enough to break up the subsoil. It is important to always plough along the contour, as this conserves topsoil and increases infiltration. This also improves drainage, which is important, as the crop cannot tolerate waterlogging.

Forming ridges and furrows
Cassava grown on ridges and furrows are less prone to damage than those grown on flat land. Ridges are recommended as they facilitate easier harvesting of the crop. You should adjust the ridging implements to form ridges of the desired height and width. Ridges formed mechanically or manually (by hand fork) should be 45 to 60 cm (18-24 inches) high and spaced 1 to 1.5 m (3–4.5 feet) apart.

Planting on unraised flat land is only recommended when the soil is deep and well-drained as with sandy loam soils.

Did you know?
The Ministry of Blue and Green Economy, Agriculture and National Food Security as well as private service providers can be contacted to do mechanical land preparation. Farmers will need to budget for this, when using private service providers as it is a paid service. Ideally, you should schedule this service 2 to 3 months in advance to avoid undue delays.