Depending on the variety, cassava is ready for harvesting between 6 and 18 months after planting. However, the harvesting period can range from 6 to 24 months.

Some physical signs that the crop is ready to be harvested:
- Yellowing and dropping of the lower leaves.
- An increase in the size of the tubers which crack through the top of the soil.

Manual Harvesting

Prior to harvesting, the stems of the plants are cut back, leaving 30 to 50 cm above ground. The stem is used to pull the tubers from the ground. If the soil is too hard or compact at harvesting, it is best to loosen the soil around the plant using a garden fork.

Next, hold the stem and gently pull the roots out of the ground. A manual hand lifter can also be used to lift the tubers.

Do not jerk or drag the tubers as this can cause bruising, cuts and breakage. Wounds such as these will lead to loss of moisture and provide entry for oxygen and pathogens that cause spoilage.

After uprooting, the cassava roots should be separated from the stem using a clean sharp knife or cutlass. Store roots in a cool spot and take them away from the field as soon as possible. The key is to reduce field heat.
Packing and Transporting Tubers

It is best to use harvesting crates to pack and transport the tubers from the field. Crates are durable, well ventilated, easy to sanitize and many are stackable. If they are being stacked, ensure there is sufficient room between them for ventilation. The main drawback of the crates is that they are expensive.

When packing, it is good practice to sort the tubers. Tubers that are damaged, rotting or showing signs of pest and disease attack should be placed in separate crates from the undamaged ones. The damaged tubers can contaminate the wholesome tubers.

While sacks and baskets are cheaper and widely available in Dominica, improper use leads to compression damage.

The harvested roots should be taken to the market or packing house as soon as possible.

Post-Harvest Handling

Harvested cassava deteriorates rapidly. Post-harvest handling must maintain the quality of the tubers while extending their shelf-life. Physiological deterioration is the main cause of losses after harvesting cassava. This usually manifests as a bluish/blackish discolouration in the roots known as vascular streaking. It is caused by loss of moisture and entry of oxygen through wounds on the tubers. Vascular streaking results in the roots becoming unpalatable and unmarketable.

Washing

Washing is an important operation as it removes the soil from the roots. Wash gently to prevent damage to the peels, as wounds are a pathway for entry of microorganisms and oxygen and loss of moisture.

Tubers should be placed in a chlorinated dip after washing for 60 to 90 seconds. The chlorinated dip is made of 150 parts per million (ppm) – chlorine and water. After the tubers are removed, they should be rinsed in clean, potable water to remove chlorine residues from the surface of the crop.

Storage

In Dominica, cassava is sold at the market fresh or sold to processors. If there is no ready market, the tubers can be stored at temperatures ranging between 41 °F and 45 °F (5 °C – 7 °C) with a relative humidity of 85% to 90%.