

Grow Guide

African Yam - Colombia

West African yams are a vigorous climbing vine. They require a sturdy trellis or structure to grow on. A tree can be a great support structure for yam vines provided they are planted in such a way where there isn't too much root competition. We often lean tall sticks to larger trees to allow yams to climb onto the stick, then make its way up the tree. A yam could grow more than 20 feet into a tree in one season. Teepee shaped structures made of large sticks or bamboo can also work quite well.

Dioscorea rotundata performs in moderately poor soils but certainly benefits greatly from soil enrichment. They are quite drought tolerant and can be typically grown without irrigation but can get severely stressed at a young age if drought persists and may require supplemental watering. Planting pieces should be planted with the emerging buds facing upwards, with the top of the planting piece an inch or so under the soil line. The buds emerge from the soil rapidly after planting.

Dioscorea yams have a very unique feature of their growth being totally fixed seasonally. They have a defined growing period and a defined dormancy period. Cultural practices cannot change these cycles. The yam pieces should be planted in March when active buds are visible. In December-January the vines turn brown as the plant goes dormant. The tubers are only harvested while the plant is in a dormant phase. Earlier harvests will have minimal tubers, as the starch is still in the canopy of the plant. As it goes dormant it stores the starch in a tuber.

If expanding plantings is desired, wait until roughly February 20th to begin harvests. Only cut yams for planting pieces when active growth has started as earlier cutting will result in rotting. At this time, yams can be harvested.

The bottom can be eaten and the top portion replanted. Bottom parts of yams can be cut up and planted but they take longer to emerge and top or "head" pieces are more desirable.

