

# Timely cassava planting to minimize mealybugs

## Recognize the problem

Cassava mealybugs are also called "Vidung'ata" in Swahili. They are tiny insects, less than ½ cm in size. They are soft-bodied, wingless, and covered by white wax and hairs. They appear like small white cotton masses on stems and on the underside of leaves. Mealybugs distort terminal shoots, and curl leaves. They also lead to small leaves and stunted plants.

## Background

Young mealybugs are crawlers and can spread over the plant or can be dispersed to neighbouring plants by wind. Adult mealybugs are less mobile. They are covered with wax to protect them from desiccation, predators and pesticides. They do not thrive well during the rainy season because they can be washed off or drown in the water. The most favourable period is the dry season. Timely cassava growing means growing the crop by avoiding the dry season and thus avoiding mealybugs.

## Management

- Prepare the land two months before the end of the heavy rainfall season, for example in February in the coastal areas
- Prepare cassava cuttings from disease free plants
- Only use the middle part of the stem for preparing cuttings
- The length of each cutting has to range from 20cm to 30cm with 6 to 8 nodes for good root initiation
- Grow the crop early. This means planting cassava two months before the end of heavy rainfall. The period varies from one place to another. For example in Coastal, Northern and Southern regions of Tanzania it is April, and for the Central zone it is between February and March.

Cassava plant infested by Cassava mealybug. (Photo by CABI)



Cassava plant infested by Cassava mealybug. (Photo by CABI)



Scientific name(s) > *Phenacoccus manihoti*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Tanzania



Authors: Joyce Paul Bakengi  
Temeke Municipal Council  
tel: 0713327908, 0687634714 email: joycekalikawe@yahoo.com

Edited by Plantwise.