

Why a kitchen garden's handy

By NGURE K. N.

A KITCHEN garden is an accessible piece of land used for growing crops meant for use in the household kitchen. Crops grown include onions, spinach, chillies, kales (sukuma wiki) and potatoes among others. The choice of the crops grown depends on consumer preferences. The crops are grown by the consumer or under his or her close supervision. Some people view a kitchen garden as a sign of working poor. However, owning a kitchen garden has more to offer than just financial relief.

Today's working class people have several problems relating to food. All or most of the foodstuffs must be bought from the market. The sources of these foods remain unknown. There are several questions that need to be asked while purchasing for foods. For example, were any pesticides used? If yes, what pesticide was it? was it a systemic or contact type? when was it done and what rates were used? What about fungicides and herbicides? There is alot that one needs to be cautious

about. But for sure none of the above questions will be answered. There is also no way you can test for yourself unless you are buying for the analysis.

The consumer ends up hoping for the best, and in all cases preferring the healthy looking vegetables for his meals.

A healthy crop is every producer's goal, to produce something that would sell fast and fetch good money. In the process, chemicals have been used sometimes in excess reaching toxic levels.

A professor of microbiology in a local university gave the following words to his students as his last lecture of the semester. "It is your duty to advise the farmers on the correct use of chemicals to control micro-organisms. If you fail we are all at risk including yourself." He further added and told them to only recommend them for use when it is absolutely necessary.

Failure to protect a crop might result in big financial loss for the farmer. It would be irrational to produce a crop without considering its protection from diseases and

pests and also its nutritional needs, unfortunately what may kill other living organisms must be poisonous to us too. This is the lesson the professor was emphasising on that day. Unfortunately, that is not all. Some very outrageous practices are happening.

Probably out of ignorance, today, sewage water is used to irrigate crops that for sure never lack in nutrients, and has, as a result produced a very healthy crop. It is for such reasons that a kitchen garden is worth owning.

It is very difficult to tell how healthy a healthy looking crop is unless the consumer has been the producer. In kitchen farming lies the answer as the consumer can produce the best without putting too much at risk.

To keep use of chemical to a minimum in kitchen garden is possible. To reduce fertiliser use, compost manure made from kitchen waste can be used. This will also give an easy outlet to garbage handling that has become a nightmare in our urban centres.

The other advantage is availability of fresh vegetables.

With a kitchen garden, one can provide for the family a rare or expensive food crop like green peas or French beans. We often leave edible herbs we depended on in the rural areas as we move to urban areas. This is not necessary because it is possible to carry them along and plant in a gardens within reach. Then there is the financial aspect. To provide a balanced diet for the family is expensive as parents often find themselves short of money. It is at such times that crop growing come in handy.

Those living in rental houses might find it difficult to own a kitchen garden, either due to lack of space or the nature of the "tenure system". Fortunately, among them are tenants who are very innovative. Their gardens are in form of containers, wooden boxes or perforated pipes filled with soil that are watered regularly.

This is a practice that would go along way to educating our children. Those brought up in urban areas sometimes reach middle age without realising how much human being are dependent on mother nature.