

Cowpea harvesting

The cowpea, *Vigna unguiculata* (L.) Walp is a leguminous plant grown everywhere in Benin. Its seeds are an important source of vegetable protein (around 25%), vitamins for human consumption provide income for farmers and animal fodder. Unfortunately, grain reserves are destroyed by a strong pest, the cowpea weevil or *Callosobruchus maculatus*. Controlling this destructive pest is part of good harvest management on the assumption that the pre-cultivation operations had been well done. This factsheet covers harvesting practices.

Cowpea products

Depending on the period and the goal, 3 products are derived from cowpea cultivation:

- Green pods that are cut and sold before cowpeas mature.
- Dry pods for dry seeds (the most targeted).
- Leaves are used as livestock feed.

Preparing cowpeas for harvesting

During harvesting, certain practices are recommended, while others are to be avoided to minimise infestation of cowpeas by certain insects and rot.

Harvesting process

- Harvest only when the pods are ripe and dry, i.e. the majority of pods are yellow (Fig. 6): burst pods.
- Cowpeas should be harvested when the moisture content in the seeds is between 14 and 18%.
- Plan the harvest according to the variety involved, the quantity of pods remaining and availability of labour.

- Sundry the pods on the ground or on a plastic sheet.
- Harvesting of cowpeas is done at the beginning of the dry season, when the dry pods can await harvest within a week without getting wet.
- Avoid the end of the rainy season, which may lead to rotting of pods.
- Take into account the fact that all the seeds do not ripen at the same time because of different flowering times.
- After harvest, prepare cowpeas for storage: threshing of pods, cleaning and winnowing to separate seeds from vines.



Fig. 1: Sale of green cowpea pods



Fig. 2: A harvest of dry cowpea pods



Fig. 4: Infested grains



Fig. 5: Moisture meter

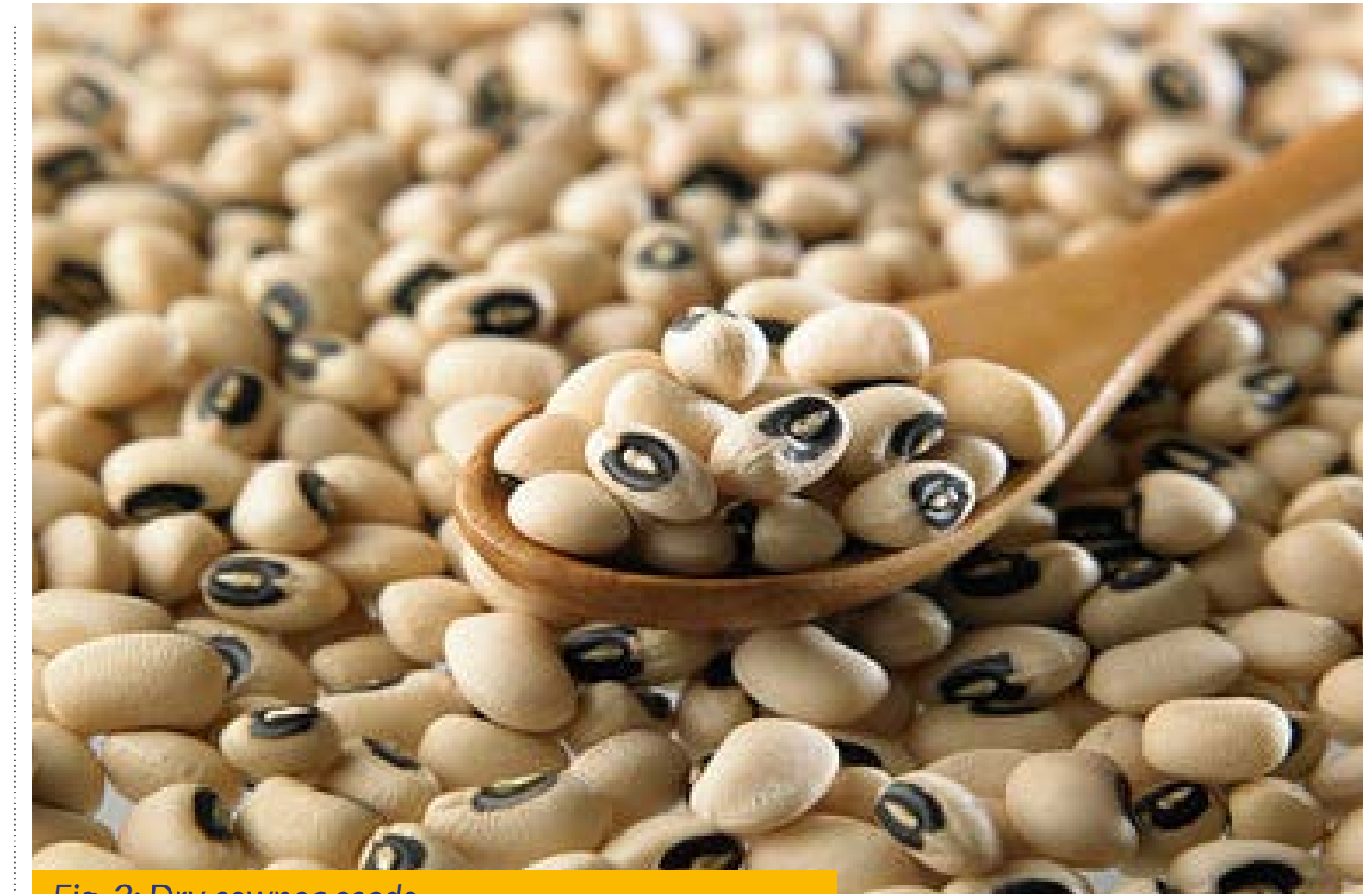


Fig. 3: Dry cowpea seeds



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Fig. 6: Cowpea Pods



Fig. 7: A harvest of dry cowpea pods



Fig. 8: Cowpea varieties at different stages

