



Botanical name: Piper methysticum

Common name: Kava

Tongan name: Kava Tonga

Other names:

DESCRIPTION & USES

Scientific name - *Piper methysticum*, Tongan name - *Kava Tonga*.

Kava is the noblest of all Tongan plants. Kava presentation using dried or raw forms is a major component of social and important ceremonies like funeral, wedding, and other tradition ceremonies. The roots and rhizomes of the kava plant are cut, sun-dried and crushed into a powder. The powder is mixed with water to produce a mildly narcotic drink predominantly consumed by men. Kava grows best after a long period of fallow. Lowered soil fertility and nematode infestation with successive crops can reduce yields.

Kava

PRODUCTION NOTES

Climate: Kava requires, as periods of drought can lead to considerably lower yields. Kava is found in wet equatorial or subtropical climates. It requires shade, high average temperatures of 20 to 35°C, 70 to 100% relative humidity and a well-distributed annual rainfall of about 1800 to 2000 mm.

Soil: Kava requires soils with high fertility, good drainage and high organic matter content, with a pH of 5.5-6.5.



Propagation: Planting material is cutting with 1 or 2 nodes of branches of a freshly harvested plant; 3 to 4 cuttings are planted in each mound. One stem provides enough cuttings for 3 mounds. Planting material should be treated against nematode infestation.

Planting density: Approximate spacing of 1.5m by 1.5m can be used (i.e., 1800 plants/ac). For intercropping it would be more appropriate to use a spacing of 2.5m by 2.5m (i.e., a planting density of 650 plants/ac).

Planting time: January to April is the preferred time of planting since high humidity is required shortly after the germination phase.

Intercropping: Intercrops can be planted once the kava is 3 months old; common intercroppings are coconuts, taro and bananas. Intercrops will provide food and/or cash in the period while the kava is not productive.

Pests and diseases: Kava wilt is one of the main problems of kava production. Research is underway to find the cause and ways kava wilt can be prevented. Kava is also affected by nematodes, including the root burrowing and root knot nematodes; several types of fungi; and the kava weevil borer.

Growth period: Kava used to be harvested after 5 to 10 or more years of growth. It is now harvested as early as 3 to 4 years after planting.

Processing: Processing includes cleaning of stems and roots with water, cutting up the product for quicker drying, and drying in the sun. On average 1kg of green kava yields 0.6kg of dry (powdered) kava.

Marketing notes:

Supplies in Talamahu market is not recorded annually but the average market price is about T\$100 per kg for dried kava and about \$150 for powdered kava. Kava is also a major export crop with an average of 1,674.08 tonnes are exported annually. Potential for growth is great.

For more information

Address: Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forests (MAFF)