About yam

The yam tuber is a preferred main source of carbohydrate and income for millions of people in Africa. Over two-thirds of the world’s yam production comes from the “yam zone” of West and Central Africa, where the crop plays an important part in livelihoods and traditional culture. The research-for-development objectives at IITA focuses on developing new technologies and varieties of yam with desired agronomic and quality traits and improved yam-based cropping systems; and improving demand for yam and yam products based on market demands and preferences of farmers and local communities.

Yam at a glance

Scientific name: Dioscorea rotundata / D. cayenensis
Origin: Africa: White Guinea yam, D. rotundata and Yellow yam, D. cayenensis; Asia: Water yam, D. alata
Global area devoted to crop: 4.6 m ha
Global production: 48 million tons
Major producer: Nigeria
Per capita consumption in Africa: 1 kg
Uses: food and cultural uses (fertility and marriage ceremonies, harvest festivals)
Major pests and diseases: leaf and tuber beetles, mealybugs, scales, parasitic nematodes, anthracnose, leaf spot, leaf blight, tuber rot, yam mosaic virus

Yam for livelihoods

- 60 million people in West Africa eat yam as a staple food
- 31.8% of the Nigerian population and 26.2% in Ghana depend on yam for food and income security
- 48 million tons of yam are produced annually in West Africa on 4 million hectares
- 93% of world yam is produced by 5 African countries: Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo
- 68% of global production produced in Nigeria = 36 million tons on 3 million hectares
- Average capita consumption per day ranges from 193 kcal a day in Togo to 502 kcal in Côte d’Ivoire