

Clipping big pepper

A pruning technique to increase pepper production in Sierra Leone



What is clipping?

Clipping is the removal or the pinching off of the terminal bud. As opposed to "topping", "clipping" is practiced at early stage, when the seedlings are still in the nursery, allowing in this way to reduce the workload for this operation.

Reasons or advantages of clipping

- To improve branching and enhance the plant's growth;
- To stimulate the production of female flowers and increase the quantity and size of fruits harvested;
- Clipping is less labour intensive as compared to Topping, as it can be done in a small area (the nursery), without having to go over the whole field.

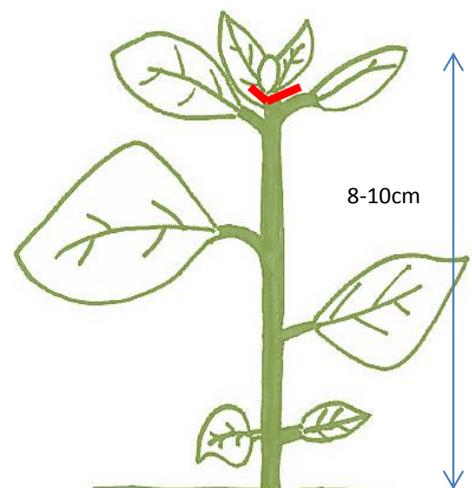


How to nurse the seeds?

- Select a very fertile and well drained loamy soil to nurse the seeds;
- Construct a bed with a dimension of at least 4m by 1m to facilitate free hand broadcasting;
- Avoid nursing on very wide beds because it is very difficult to clip efficiently in that case;
- Do free hand broadcasting to enhance rapid growth of seedlings;
- Apply compost or back yard manure on the nursery to facilitate healthy and rapid growth of the seedlings.

How to clip big pepper?

- Clipping can be done using a small sharp knife, scissors or simply by hand, which appears to be the preferred method used by most of the farmers we work with in the north of Sierra Leone.
- Weed the nursery bed before clipping to facilitate the operation.
- Using your hand, knife or scissors, carefully remove the terminal bud which is located at the most top part of the plant.
- Farmers should be careful not to cut the first 2 leaves beneath the terminal bud because it will slow the seedling growth or sometimes leads to seedling death.
- Seedlings do not grow uniformly, so clip only the taller seedlings (8 to 10 cm in height) and transplant them 1 week after clipping
- Water the beds intensively after clipping.



When to clip?

- Clipping in the nursery is done when the seedlings are 4 to 5 weeks old, depending on the fertility of the soil and the growth of the seedlings.
- Clipping should always be done in the evening (or the morning), when the sun is low.

Observed effect on the production

In order to measure the effect of clipping, comparative beds of big pepper, with and without clipping, have been established with 15 farmers. All these 15 farmers are located in Sanda Loko chiefdom (Bombali district - north of Sierra Leone). A close follow-up of the production was done, as the harvest occurred at different periods: each time, the production was weighted and recorded. For all farmers, the clipping method has improved the number of branches (+34% on average), and increased the production (+40% on average). All farmers proceed to clipping 4 to 5 weeks after sowing.

Overview of the effect on the branching



Clipped peper



Non-clipped pepper

A few considerations

In the north of Bombali district, very few farmers know and practice pruning techniques on pepper ("big or small"). Done at nursery stage, the clipping technique appears to be quite simple to implement and seems to provide the same results as the topping method in terms of production, would it be for big or small pepper. A main limitation the farmers encountered with the topping method was the additional workload it creates, as going back to every plant in the field is tedious, and represents an important task that comes on top of weeding, which is already heavy. The clipping method allows to considerably reduce this workload. Further experience sharing on the implementation of this practice is expected in the coming year.



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June 2015

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