

Traditional Kumara Curing and Storage

With such dependence on kumara as a basic food necessity, it is little wonder that great attention was paid to its growth, harvest and storage. Many rites were performed through the various stages of production, storage and release from store. And there were careful rules surrounding storage practices. The information in this Tip is from the book, "*Maori Agriculture*" by Elsdon Best, published in 1925 and reprinted in 1976.

Historic Practices for Kumara Storage

The book, "*Maori Agriculture*" by Elsdon Best contains numerous reports of traditional Maori practice, with substantial attention paid to kumara.

Harvest

Kumara were considered mature when the leaves of the plants turned brown. The general harvest (*hauhakenga*) was done in March or April, a dry sunny day being always chosen to avoid the danger of mouldiness. However if there was frost or heavy rain, the roots were dug at once to save them from rotting or second growth.

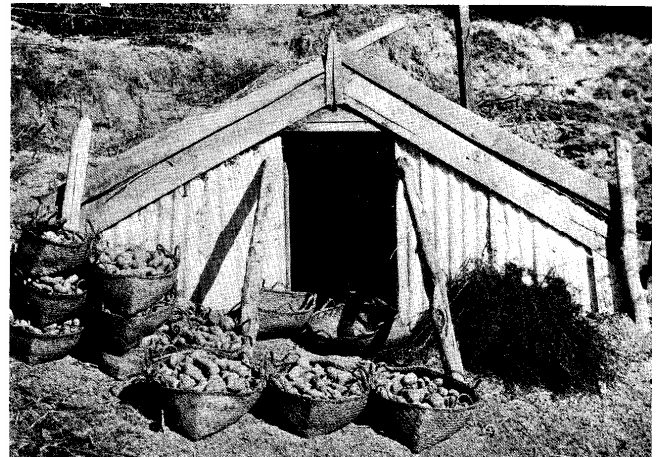
Digging didn't begin until the sun was well up. A *kaheru* (short tool) was used to lift kumara pushing it into the base of the mounds and turning the soil.

On the East Coast, recovered tubers were placed aside to dry, and when dried, they were collected in heaps which were covered with a layer of haulm, and then with earth. The tubers were sorted into different sizes and all damaged ones were set aside for immediate use. The sorting process is described by the term *kopana*.

Storage

Storehouse floors were lined with fine gravel or dried decayed wood. Kumara were stacked in overlapping rows, with food tubers and seed tubers kept separate by a barrier.

Kumara that were to be stored in *rua* (pits) were placed in *tiraha* (large flax baskets) which were all made the same size. These can be seen in the photo of a semi-subterranean storehouse from Waiapu district (Image 1). The manuka brush to the right of the baskets was used as dunnage.



Semi-sub-terranean storehouse, Waiapu District

Image 1 from *Maori Agriculture* p225



A Rua Kumara - store pit for kumara, East Coast.

Image 2 from *Maori Agriculture* p226

Image 2 shows a more traditional design excavated into a bank, then recovered with soil to control the internal environment (and thieves).

'Te Pānui Tips' are simple fact sheets that cover topics designing organic crop production systems on the East Coast.

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