Kenyan vegetable and fruit names: a buyer's glossary.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Sukuma is collard greens, managu is African nightshade, terere is amaranth leaves, hoho is capsicum, nduma is arrowroot and matoke is green cooking banana. The tables below cover the names you will meet on a Nairobi supplier's list.

Why the names matter when you order

A new chef, a buyer from outside Kenya, or a supplier list written half in Swahili and half in English: this is where orders go wrong. Someone asks for kale and expects curly leaves. Someone orders arrowroot and expects a powder. The produce arrives, it is not what the menu needs, and the kitchen loses a service finding a replacement.

This glossary gives the local name, the English name and how each item is normally sold in Nairobi, so the person writing the order and the person receiving it mean the same thing. Prices change every week, so they are not listed here. You will find them on this week's price list.

Leafy greens

Greens are where local names are used most. Almost all are sold by the bunch, and bunch sizes vary between suppliers, so agree what a bunch means before you compare prices.

LOCAL NAME	IN ENGLISH	GOOD TO KNOW
Sukuma wiki	Collard greens	Often labelled kale. Flat leaves, not curly. The everyday green of Kenyan kitchens.
Managu	African nightshade	Dark leaves, slightly bitter. Usually cooked down, often with milk or cream.
Terere	Amaranth leaves	Also called mchicha. Soft leaves that cook quickly.
Kunde	Cowpea leaves	Earthy flavour. Often mixed with other greens.
Saga	Spider plant	Also saget. Bitter when raw, milder once boiled.
Mrenda	Jute mallow	Turns silky when cooked, in the way okra does.
Kabichi	Cabbage	Sold by the piece or by the kilo. Check which before you compare.
Dhania	Coriander leaves	Also giligilani. Sold by the bunch. Wilts fast, so order little and often.

> Indigenous greens such as managu, terere, kunde and saga shrink a great deal when cooked. Plan your order from the cooked portion you need, not the raw volume.

Vegetables, roots and staples

LOCAL NAME	IN ENGLISH	GOOD TO KNOW
Hoho	Capsicum, bell pepper	In full, pilipili hoho. Green is cheapest. Red and yellow cost more.
Pilipili	Chilli	Say which you want: hoho is sweet, pilipili kali is hot.
Nyanya	Tomatoes	Sold by the kilo or the crate. Ask about ripeness if you are buying for the week.
Kitunguu	Onions	Red onions are standard. White onions and spring onions are listed separately.
Kitunguu saumu	Garlic	Local garlic has smaller cloves than imported. Suppliers usually say which they stock.
Tangawizi	Ginger	Sold by the kilo.
Viazi	Potatoes	Also waru. Often called Irish potatoes, to tell them apart from sweet potatoes.
Ngwaci	Sweet potatoes	Also viazi vitamu, and sometimes written ngwashe.
Nduma	Arrowroot (taro)	A fresh root, boiled or fried. It is not the starch powder sold as arrowroot abroad.
Matoke	Green cooking bananas	Cooked as a starch. Not the same as plantain, and not ripe bananas.
Karoti	Carrots	Sold by the kilo.
Bamia	Okra	Also called lady’s fingers.
Biringanya	Aubergine, eggplant	Sold by the kilo.
Boga	Pumpkin	Sold by the piece or by the kilo, depending on size.
Minji	Green peas	Sold in the pod or shelled. Shelled costs more per kilo and saves labour.

Fruit

LOCAL NAME	IN ENGLISH	GOOD TO KNOW
Ndizi	Bananas	Ripe eating bananas. Sweet bananas are a smaller variety and are listed separately.
Embe	Mango	Variety and season change the price a lot. Apple, Ngowe and Kent are common names.
Parachichi	Avocado	Ask whether fruit is ready to eat or needs a few days.
Nanasi	Pineapple	Usually sold by the piece.

LOCAL NAME	IN ENGLISH	GOOD TO KNOW
Tikiti maji	Watermelon	Sold by the kilo or by the piece.
Papai	Pawpaw, papaya	Sold by the kilo or by the piece.
Chungwa	Orange	Pixie is a small, sweet, easy-peel variety.
Ndimu	Lime	Small and green. Often what a recipe written in Kenya means by lemon.
Limau	Lemon	Larger and yellow. Check which one your recipe needs.
Karakara	Passion fruit	More often just called passion. Sold by the kilo.

How produce is sold in Nairobi

The same item can be priced in different units by different suppliers. Before you compare two prices, check that you are comparing the same thing.

- **By the bunch:** leafy greens and herbs such as sukuma, spinach, managu, terere, dhania, mint and rosemary.
- **By the kilo:** most vegetables, roots and fruit, including tomatoes, onions, potatoes, carrots, mangoes and lemons.
- **By the piece:** cabbage, pineapple and apples, and sometimes pumpkin and watermelon.
- **By count:** bananas and small oranges are often priced for a set number of pieces.

On the Wapishi price list every item shows its unit next to the price, and the shop shows the same unit when you order.

Three mix-ups worth avoiding

Kale and sukuma

If a recipe or a chef asks for kale and means the curly variety, say so. An order for kale in Nairobi will normally bring sukuma wiki.

Lemon and lime

Ndimu and limau are used loosely in everyday speech. Order by colour and size if it matters to the dish: small and green, or large and yellow.

Matoke, plantain and banana

Matoke is a green cooking banana that is boiled or stewed. Plantain is larger, is usually fried or roasted, and is sold separately. Neither is the ripe banana you put on a breakfast buffet.

Using this when you order

Write the name your supplier uses, add the English name in brackets if your team is mixed, and always state the unit. “Managu (African nightshade), 20 bunches” leaves no room for doubt. If an item you need is not on a supplier’s list, ask. Availability changes with the season, and a good supplier will tell you what can stand in.

Quick answers

What is managu in English?

Managu is African nightshade, a dark leafy green with a slightly bitter taste. It is sold by the bunch.

What is terere in English?

Terere is amaranth leaves, also called mchicha in Swahili. It is sold by the bunch.

Is sukuma wiki the same as kale?

Sukuma wiki is collard greens. It is often labelled kale in Kenya, but it has flat leaves rather than the curly leaves of the kale sold abroad.

What is hoho?

Hoho, or pilipili hoho, is capsicum, also called bell pepper or sweet pepper. It comes in green, red and yellow.

Buying for a kitchen in Nairobi?

Wapishi supplies fresh produce and kitchen staples to restaurants, hotels, caterers and canteens. Prices are published every week, and the latest version of this guide is online.

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