

THEMBILI

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There are three varieties of coconut in Sri Lanka. These are *typica* (tall) *nana* (dwarf) and *aurantiaca* (thembili or generally referred to as king coconut). Thembili occupies a unique position in view of its medicinal properties and the sweetness of nut water. The nut water in thembili contains 5–6% sucrose and is therefore sweeter than the nut water of other varieties. Thembili is a popular drink and is mostly cultivated for this purpose. It is endemic to Sri Lanka and is appreciated as a good drink even by tourists.

The nut of thembili is yellowish red in colour. It is mostly spherical or slightly oblong in shape. The most important feature is the button-like portion at the distal end of the nut. Occasionally, this character is seen in the yellow dwarf variety but it could be distinguished from thembili by its colour. There are two forms of thembili. They are *rath thembili* or king coconut and *nawasi thembili*. *Rath thembili* has all the characters described above, while in *nawasi thembili* the nut is slightly elongated. In immature *nawasi thembili*, the mesocarp near the "eyes" could be eaten.

When the features of thembili tree are considered, it would be seen that the fronds are erect and uniformly spread in the crown. The rachis and the petiole are reddish yellow in colour. The trunk is uniform but a bole could be seen. The height is intermediate and is about 12m (40 feet). In the dwarf variety, the distal end of the frond appears to be wilting. Because of this feature, dwarf and thembili varieties could be distinguished. Thembili flowers after 4–5 years of transplanting and generally yields about 100 nuts per year. However, it is not uncommon to yield 200–250 nuts per year.

Thembili bears only during a part of the year, and is dormant during the rest of the period, which is from October to end February. When compared with the tall variety, thembili mostly shows self-pollination with occasional cross-pollination. In the same inflorescence, both male and female flowers mature almost at the same time for self-pollination but the probability of cross-pollination is considerable. Cross-pollination results in varieties with mixed characters. When such nuts are germinated, only about 40–60% give true thembili seedlings, while the rest would be other types.

The most suitable soil for cultivation of thembili is sandy loam soil. It could tolerate water-logging and therefore could be cultivated in water-logged areas. This variety is susceptible to pests and drought and shows a clear response to inorganic fertilizers.

It is often observed that several varieties are referred to as thembili. It is perhaps because that these varieties are similar to thembili in appearance or that their names have the word thembili. In fact, *ran thembili* and *gon thembili* are forms of *typica* (tall variety). In *gon thembili* the nut is yellowish in colour whereas in *ran thembili*, it is greenish. The red dwarf is also similar to thembili but it is not a form of thembili. As red dwarf yields early, many cultivate it as thembili. Numerous requests are made to us for dwarf thembili. It is to be emphasised that there is no such variety. The true thembili has the characters described above and its forms are only *rath thembili* and *nawasi thembili*.

Note: This is a translation of an article written in Sinhala.

SEMINAR ON COCONUT CULTIVATION

At the request of Mr. G. V. S. de Silva, member of Parliament for Habaraduwa, a seminar on coconut cultivation was organised and conducted by the Coconut Research Institute at Koggala Beach Hotel on 18th March 1987.

The seminar was declared open by the Hon. Minister of Coconut Industries Mr. Harold Herat.

The participants were mainly coconut growers and officers from the Coconut Cultivation Board from the Southern Province.

The objective of this seminar was to educate the coconut growers especially of the Southern Province, in scientific practices of coconut cultivation. At the seminar growers' problems were discussed and the necessary advice given.

