

HOW TO DETERMINE THE AGE OF A COCONUT PALM

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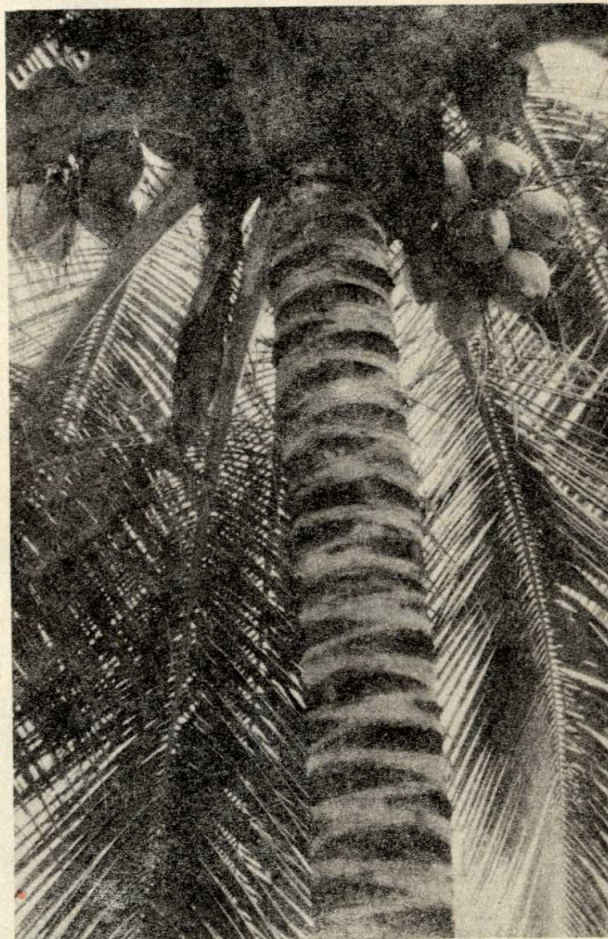
Very often, enquiries are made to the Coconut Research Institute requesting advice on age determination of coconut palms. This article briefly describes the method adopted to determine the age of a coconut palm.

A coconut palm of the tall variety normally takes about 6 years to flower and for trunk formation. The rate of growth of the trunk is about 1.5m/ year at the early stages provided there is sufficient space for the growth of the palm. Under these circumstances, it is possible to judge the age of a palm from the height.

However, when coconuts are grown under shady conditions, particularly in home gardens, the rate of trunk elongation is higher. This is often encountered in underplantations, where the second generation palms are as tall as the old stand, due to the shade cast by the older palms. In such circumstances, height does not give an indication of the age.

Coconut palm normally produces one frond per month on an average, a crown of a healthy contains about 30 fronds. When, finally, the frond falls due to senescence, it leaves behind a prominent curved scar on the trunk. This indelible scar remains permanent, and these scars do not overlap as the alternate frond takes another month to fall, and its point of attachment is few inches above the existing scar. This pattern continues, and consequently there will be almost 12 scars a year.

When it is necessary to determine the age of a coconut palm, a total count of the scars will have to be done. If the palms are tall, a pair of binoculars may have to be used. These scars are located in a spiral pattern. This pattern will have to be followed up during



Permanent leaf scars on the trunk.

counting. The total number of scars, divided by 12 will indicate the age of the palm from the date of bole formation. Addition of 6 more years, (for pre trunk stage) gives the approximate age of the palm from its planting.