

ARECANUT AS AN INTERCROP IN COCONUT LANDS

As arecanut is also a perennial like the coconut, and as both are palms they exhibit similar characteristics. Although little attention has been drawn during the past, the increasing price trend in recent years has motivated many to undertake arecanut cultivation.

The main reason for its decline has been the lack of proper planning to grow arecanut as a profitable crop, and the injudicious felling as in the case of coconut palms. In India growing arecanut is a profitable venture. In Sri Lanka arecanut could be grown systematically in coconut lands as an intercrop and could be developed to yield profits, as coconut lands in Sri Lanka are highly suitable for arecanut cultivation.

Climatic Requirements

Rainfall

Wet Zone of the coconut growing areas is highly suitable for arecanut cultivation, as this requires a well distributed annual rainfall of over 1800 mm.

Soil

Soil suitability for arecanut cultivation differs according to the coconut growing areas. For example in Gampaha district only sandy loamy soils in the lower basin on the slope of gravelly lands (Pallama series) are suitable for arecanut cultivation. In addition, in the Kurunegala area, the Kurunegala series soils situated around the Kurunegala town, which have a layer of clay, at about 3 ft depth and which retain certain amount of moisture during dry spells, are ideally suitable for growing arecanut. Likewise the reddish brown latosols & (deep soils) spreading from Melsiripura area to Matale can also be listed as highly suitable.

Varieties Recommended

According to trials conducted by the CRI the local variety has been found to be more suitable. Locally termed 'Rata Puwak' which is larger in size do not tolerate dry weather, and is low yielding when compared to the local variety.

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Planting Materials

Selected seed nuts should be laid in a small nursery comprising sandy soil. As seeds germinate they should be placed in small polythene bags 10cm wide and 20 cm in height, and planted after formation of the fourth leaf. Mother palms should have 2-3 bunches consisting of at least 150 nuts per bunch.

Suitable Coconut Lands

The age of the coconut stand where intercropping with arecanut is contemplated should be over 20 years. Although arecanut is shade tolerant, it is not advisable to plant arecanut if the age of the coconut stand is between 5-20 years. The only exception is in lands where coconuts have been planted in the avenue system (10m X 6m) where arecanut planting could be profitable irrespective of the age of the coconut stand.

Presently for CRI trials, two rows of arecanut among coconut rows of 8m X 8m distance have been selected. In each coconut row the distance between two rows of arecanut is 2m X 2m and the planting system is triangular.

Land Preparation

The rows of arecanut should be oriented East -West direction and in a slopy land avoid planting against the slope. Remove bushy weeds. Planting holes of size 0.3m X 0.3m X 0.3m will be sufficient.

Planting

Fill the planting hole using a mixture of soil and compost. Remove polythene cover prior to planting the seedling. Do not bury the plant deep into the soil.

Fertilizer Application

During the first three years it is important to apply fertilizer twice. The Coconut Adult Palm mixture is recommended as follows.

		g/tree		
	April/May		Oct./ Nov.	
1. Year	= 250		= 250	
2. Year	= 350		= 350	
3. Year	= 400		= 400	
4. Year	= Once a year 1 kg/tree			and onwards

During the first three years of planting, fertilizer should be spread within a circle of radius 0.6m from the base of the plant, and well incorporated into the soil and from the 4th year onwards the manure circle should be extended upto 1m from its base.

Pests and Diseases

Arecanut in Sri Lanka is free from major pests and diseases. Occurrence of bud rot has been recorded rarely.

Weeds

Slashing of weeds as done in coconut lands will be sufficient.

Harvesting

Ripe fruits fall naturally, or after bat damage, and these could be collected. Bunches with ripe fruits (orange in colour) could be cut down with a picking pole.

Yield

Arecanut palms flower in 3-4 years, and start bearing after 5 years. At the 7th year a palm yields about 200 nuts. Although arecanut palms flower around the whole year the fruits are available for harvesting in Sept/Oct. The nuts attain maturity four months after flowering.



Two rows of arecanut planted in between two rows of Coconut