

# NIGHT FIRES ON COCONUT ESTATES

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ON many a coconut estate, it is a common sight to see bonfires blazing a trail of destruction of valuable organic matter that should be returned to the soil either to add to the supplies of humus or used as a mulch for the conservation of soil moisture.

In spite of all the propaganda carried out on the value of organic matter, in the course of our advisory work, this practice of starting night fires appears to continue. It may be the result of a desire of some planters to keep their estates like parks and of some who hope to collect ash to be used as supplementary potash manures.

There is also a belief that such bonfires attract the coconut black beetle, the red weevil and the moths of the coconut caterpillar which are thereby destroyed. Needless to say these pests can be controlled by other more effective methods of plant sanitation.

Out of the debris of a coconut estate the only material that should be disposed of by burning are coconut stumps. These should never be left to decay openly, and under no circumstances should be buried, or used as fence posts or as reinforcements on drains, or for check dams. As should be known by all coconut planters, coconut stumps form one of the most prolific breeding grounds for the coconut black beetle.

In fact this reprehensible practice of using coconut stumps for these illegitimate practices seem to be widespread in view of the shortage and high cost of fence posts.

Butt ends do not serve as a breeding place for the black beetle unless buried and covered with soil. None the less when left in heaps and desiccated they decay very slowly and may therefore be burnt in small heaps, the ash collected and used as manure as explained in Coconut Research Institute Leaflet No. 9 (Locally available materials of manurial value).

The rest of the coconut frond (the so-called coconut branch) consisting of the midrib and the leaflets should under no circumstances be burnt, but utilised in the following ways :—

- (a) At the time of manuring, may be cut into short pieces, and added to the manure circles before covering with soil.
- (b) Mulching round the palms. When done after manuring this prevents the appearance of the usual heavy weed-growth on the manure circles, and at the same time helps to conserve soil moisture during dry periods. These mulches decay in due course and can be renewed.