

## SEASON'S NOTES ON COCONUT CULTIVATION

### AUGUST, SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER—IN LANDS UNDER COCONUTS

The Yala or South-West Monsoon in May/June is followed by dry weather in August and September. During these months you should give particular attention to the following:—

#### Coconut Seedlings

It is necessary that seedlings planted during the South-West Monsoon are looked after carefully, especially during the first dry weather period.

Seedlings in the early stages of growth, should preferably be watered about three times a week or at least occasionally. This will help the seedlings, especially in dry areas to establish themselves. It is in addition an advantage to mulch round seedlings. Husk is a good mulching material and should be placed, one layer thick with the convex surface (the outer brown surface) upwards. In water-logged situations husks should not be used. In white ant (Termites) infested areas husks should not be placed too close to the stem of the seedling.

Before mulching is done it is advisable to clean weed the area round the seedlings up to a radius of about 4 feet. By so doing weed growth round seedlings can be reduced to a great extent during the North-East or Maha Season to come in October/November. With the commencement of the rains, in October, any dead or very poor seedlings should be uprooted and vacancies filled by planting selected seedlings.

White ants (Termites) are a common pest in coconut lands especially in new clearings. They are known to attack coconut seedlings which ultimately die. Where white ants are found you are advised to apply any one of the following insecticides:—Aldrex 2 (Shell Co. of Ceylon Ltd.)—1 tablespoon in 15 gallons of water; or Chlordox, Aldrin (Mackwoods Ltd.) — Intox 8 (A. Baur & Co. Ltd.) — at a dilution of 1 tablespoon in 6 gallons of water. These are more effectively applied, at the base of the seedlings during dry weather, by means of a watering can at the rate of 1 gallon of diluted solution for each seedling.

#### Coconut Lands

Harrowing is best done during dry weather, followed by weeding and slashing of any left out patches.

Repairs to soil conservation bunds and cleaning of drains silted during the previous monsoon, should be carried out before the onset of the next monsoon in October.

Any dead or unwanted palms should be uprooted. Dead or decaying stumps, butt ends, etc., should be collected into heaps, allowed to dry and burnt in late August or early September. This will not only return the ash to the soil but will also help to control breeding of the Black-beetle pest.

Coconut fronds in the land should be collected and the base of the palms mulched with them. If husks are available it would be better to use these for mulching round the individual palms. But husk mulching is not recommended in water-logged situations.

### **Draining**

Cutting drains in low-lying, water-logged areas is best done during dry weather. The size, and number of drains to be cut will vary with the nature of the land. These drains should be broad at the top and narrow at the bottom. The soil from the drains should either be put round the base of the palms or spread on the surface. Under no circumstances should these drains be filled with husks or coir dust.

### **Lining**

Lining of lands for new or under planting and tracing for contour drains or bunds should be done during August/September.

In October opening of planting holes should be done with the first rains, so that the seedlings would get the full benefit of the monsoonal rains. In cutting the holes the top soil should be separately heaped from the sub-soil. Only the top-soil should be used in filling the holes and never the sub-soil. The incorporation of a layer or two of coconut husks at the bottom of the planting hole is recommended.

Soil conservation drains too should be opened early. In cutting these drains it is necessary to bund the soil at least about 9 — 12 inches away from the drain; otherwise the drains become silted if the bunds are too close to the drains. When drains are being cut, it is advisable to leave uncut blocks of earth approximately 2 feet to about 1 foot long. These blocks should then be lowered by cutting to about 6 inches below the top surface of the drain.

### **Burying Husks**

A good method of conserving soil moisture in the soil and reducing to a minimum the effects of droughts is to bury husks. It should therefore be the endeavour in all coconut lands to include a certain amount of husk burying in their cultivation programmes.

Husks may be buried in pits in the centre of palms. In this method, pits are cut usually 4' x 4' x 3' deep. The pits are filled with husks and then covered with soil. Husks may also be buried in long trenches. Such trenches are usually cut about 10 feet long 4 feet broad and 1½ feet deep. The latter method is better.

#### **Manure Circles**

Opening of manure circles, could also be done during October. In the case of seedlings, where the stem has just formed, the circular trench may be cut 2' wide and 6" deep at a distance of 2 feet from the plant. As the palms come into bearing the size of the trench may be extended to the usual manure circle, for adult palms which is 3' wide and 6" deep cut at a distance of 3' from the palm. Ploughing, if done, should not be more frequent than once in three years or so, and should always be against the slope.

#### **Catch Crops**

In new clearings catch crops should be established during the first rains in October. Repairs to fences are necessary especially to protect seedlings from cattle damage. Barbed wire fencing is best and at least 5 strands of barbed wire should be used. Coconut stumps should not be used as fence posts as these will decay with time and breed the black-beetle pest of coconut palms.

If you desire to have any advise on any of the above operations, or a demonstration of lining for planting, or tracing for contour drains please contact the Advisory Field Officer of your area (a list of their names and addresses is given elsewhere in this Journal), or write direct to the Advisory Division, Coconut Research Institute, Lunuwila.

#### **Coconut Caterpillar and Coconut Scale**

Be on the look out for dry weather pests — the Coconut Scale and Coconut Caterpillar. The Crop Protection Division of the Coconut Research Institute is at your service to help you to tackle these pests.

*Our service is rendered absolutely free of cost.*