

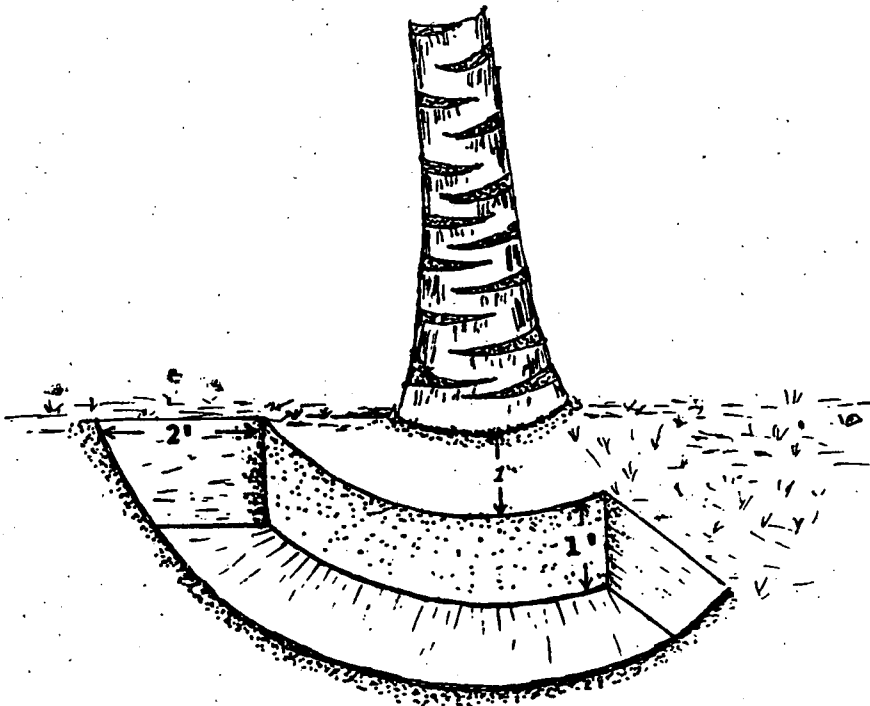
REHABILITATION OF LOW YIELDING COCONUT PALMS

The coconut palm, under reasonable management, gives a satisfactory yield upto the age of 60-70 years. It may then decline due to senility, with concurrent yield decline. Obviously, it is uneconomical to maintain such senile palms. However, it is not uncommon to find much younger palms declining due to a variety of reasons, the commonest being neglect. In palms subjected to neglect, the root system is very often considerably deteriorated resulting in diminished absorption of minerals and water, thereby debilitating the palm.

The poor condition of such palms can be greatly overcome by inducing the palm to produce new roots, thereby restoring the palm's ability to absorb minerals and water.

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The Coconut Research Institute is currently conducting experiments on the possible methods of root rejuvenation. Although these experiments are essentially long-term, some interesting observations have been made after several years of experimentation. In these studies conducted in the Wet and Dry Intermediate zones, cheap cultural practices have been found to be profitable in rehabilitating unproductive palms.



Method of rehabilitation

Essentially, this is a root pruning exercise to induce new root formation from the bole. A trench, 60 cm (2') wide and 30 cm (1') deep is opened, 30 cm (1') away from the bole of the palm. The trench should be quarter of the circle around the palm. It was observed that about 100-125 roots are cut in this process. The trench is then filled with 30 kg gliroidia leaves (with tender shoots) or Ipil-ipil leaves and covered with soil upto the ground level.

Two years later another quarter circle trench may be opened in the opposite side of the palm, as described above. In this manner it is possible to complete the full circle in six years.

Inorganic fertilizer may be applied to the palm as recommended with the onset of rains.

In the experiments, an improvement in the number of fronds, bunches and nuts per palm has been observed after two years of treatment. In fact, the nut production of low-yielding palms has increased from 15-20 nuts per palm per year to 50-60 nuts per palm per year. Although the full results of this interesting experiment will be known in a couple of years, the present trends indicate the possibility of using this method for the rehabilitation of low-yielding palms.

DR D V LIYANAGE

Dr D V Liyanage, Chairman of the Coconut Research Board since September, 1983, relinquished his position in December, 1988.

Dr Liyanage was appointed Chairman after a long and fruitful career with the Food & Agriculture Organization. During his tenure of office at the CRB, a five-year research programme was launched at the CRI in 1984. This programme gave high priority to the pressing problems of the industry such as drought, cost of production, etc. He was honoured with the presidential award 'Vidya Nidhi' (First Class) in 1987 for his scientific achievements and contribution to coconut research.

Dr Liyanage was appointed a member of the Coconut Development Authority in March, 1989. We wish him continued success in his future endeavours.

