PLANT FACT SHEET

Cocos nucifera L.

GENUS *Cocos* **FAMILY** Arecaceae

COMMON NAMES Coconut

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Nuts, Sap, Cabbage, Nuts milk, Apple, Palm heart, Flowers

The liquid of fresh nuts is drunk.
The flesh is eaten, and the "apple" in sprouting nuts is eaten.
The flesh is grated and used in cooking as "coconut" milk.
The young shoots at the top of the palm can be eaten. This kills the palm. It is fried or added to curries.
The sap from the flower stalk can be tapped for the sugary juice.
The oil can be extracted from the kernel.

DESCRIPTION

A palm with an unbranched trunk. The trunk has ring-like leaf scars along it. At the base it is swollen and surrounded by a mass of roots. They grow to about 25 m tall. Dwarf varieties have been produced. The fronds are 2-6 m long. They are divided along the stalk into strap shaped leaflets. The leaflets are 60-90 cm long. They are narrow and tapering. Clusters of large fruit develop beneath the fronds. Male and female flowers are separate on the one stalk. Female flowers are near the base. Flowers are cream. The flowers are covered by boat shaped bracts. About 10-12 fruit/stalk is a good crop. Leaves are up to 5 m long. Fruit can be 25 cm across. The fruit are fibrous. The hard shell inside is filled with coconut milk and the white copra layer.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. Mainly in coastal areas but occasionally up to 1000 m in the tropics. In Fiji coconut palms rarely fruit above 400 m altitude. Temperatures of 27°-32°C are best with a daily range of 5-7°C. They need a minimum temperature of over 18°C to bear fruit. They need over 1000 mm of rain/year preferably 1500 mm. Soils need to be well drained. It requires plenty of sunlight. Sunlight of 1,800 hours per year gives good growth. It is salt tolerant. It can tolerate soils with pH between 5-8. In Nepal plants grow to 500 m altitude. Coconuts are normally confined to within 26° of the equator. It suits hardiness zones 12. In Yunnan. At ECHO.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Seeds should be selected from regular bearing palms that produce more than 80 nuts per year. Selected nuts are sprouted in a nursery, then planted out. Seeds that have not germinated within 3 months are usually rejected. Seedlings are ready for transplanting when they have 3-4 leaves (about 1 year). The nut should be

planted in a hole 0.6 x 0.6 m. A spacing of about 7-8 m is suitable. Temperatures need to be above 15°C for nuts to germinate.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Early germinating nuts, give early production in the field. They can commence production after 6-8 years. The best yields are often produced between 12 and 60 years of age. Trees can live for 100 years. Palms can produce 15-100 nuts per year. Fruit take about 1 year to be mature. Tapping the flower stalk can give 1 kg sap/day for 6 months.
For palm hearts plants are put at a close spacing of about 2 m and are ready to harvest in 2 years.

NOTES

There is now only one Cocos species.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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