

Tropics

Trade name: Coconut.**Common names:** **English:** Coconut palm **Swahili:** Mnazi.

Ecology: One of the world's most useful trees, of great economic importance. It grows naturally at sea level in light sandy soils. The only species of Cocos, its origins are uncertain but thought to be in the western Pacific. Now grown throughout the tropics, the tree is called "green gold" in South India. In Uganda, coconut is not common but can grow well near Lake Victoria and at Butiaba on Lake Albert, requiring plenty of rain and sun.

Uses: Food (fruit), drink (palm wine), oil (copra), thatching (leaves).

Description: A palm with a slender trunk up to 20 m in Uganda, often curved, the trunk swollen at the base where typical "stem roots" can be seen. **BARK:** grey-brown, smooth with regular leaf-scar rings. **LEAVES:** **20-30 leaves top the single trunk**, pinnate, each taking a month to grow 2.5-5.0 m long, with many long narrow sharp-pointed leaflets arising from a stiff midrib. **FLOWERS:** arise from a branched stalk beside leaves, orange-yellow, very many scented male flowers at the tip and fewer female flowers at the base, 12-20 together. **FRUIT:** large and oval, about 30 cm long, a green outer covering turning yellow, 3 layers within and liquid "coconut milk" in the centre, becoming sweet as the fruit (a drupe) matures. The seed embryo lies on the inside layer with a massive food store of thick white albumen—the kernel or "coconut meat".

Propagation: Seedlings raised in trenches for four months before planting out.

Seed: The outer skin encloses the outside layer, a thick, fibrous husk. The inner "nut" has a hard shell with 3 circular eyes.

treatment: Bury the whole fruit in the ground, "eyes" up, with about 1/4 of the fruit above the surface of the soil. It will sprout through the largest "eye" after heavy watering. Transplant when first leaf is about 15 cm.

storage: the thick endosperm provides nutrients for the embryo for some time.

Management: In good conditions at sea level the tree should bear its first crop in 7-8 years, but fruit in Uganda are poor.

Remarks: Planting should be encouraged around Lake Victoria and in the Western Rift Valley as back-yard trees or with other crops. In the Far East they say "If you can count the hairs on your head then you can count all the uses of the coconut palm". The outer husks, the "coir" of commerce, can be used for ropes, etc. The hard shell makes a special charcoal used in jet aircraft. Dried kernel is "copra" from which coconut oil and dried coconut are made. When flowering, the shoot can be tapped to make palm wine or toddy, which is also used as yeast for bread making.

