

Producing the heavenly drink from coconut

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Coconut palm is one of the oldest flowering trees in the world. The nutrient-rich sap (Neera) that exudes from the blossoms before they mature into coconuts is used to make many unique and nutritious food products.

The freshly collected coconut tree sap with its nearly neutral pH and inherently sweet taste by nature is fast becoming a popular



Healthy Inflorescence

drink on account of its highly nutritive value, delicious taste and rich flavor. This article describes the various steps in neera tapping.

The female flower within the unopened spadix causes a swelling at the base and its appearance indicates the appropriate stage for tapping. The yield of sap gradually increases and when it reaches the maximum, the collection is made twice a day. The flow of the sap from the inflorescence continues for about two months or even more. After one month from the tapping of first inflorescence, the second spadix is also brought into production. The tapping is usually



Swelling Base (ready for tapping)

continued for a period of six months.

Step by step process of neera tapping

The first step is to identify skilled tappers for neera tapping.

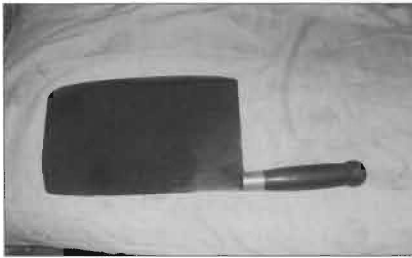
Choose coconut tree with unopened spathe. It should be bearing healthy coconut fruit buds. The palm is then tied with coconut husks with the help of coir rope at every two feet interval.

Process of Neera tapping will start with the cutting of unopened inflorescence of marked palm with knife (katiyaal). The whole spathe is then beaten and pound with a hammer (traditionally femur bone of deer was used for this process) and the bud gets swollen.

The cut spathe shall be tied with coconut leaf or a rope and cover the face of spathe with sterilized clay. It helps in extracting more neera. The sap begins to ooze out after 15 days from beating the flower bud which can be collected twice daily. Same steps are repeated daily—cutting, beating, clay application etc. Tappers need to keep hygienic condition in each step of tapping and they must put anti ferment solution into neera collecting container after tapping.



Neera tapping site of CIT at Nedumbasserry



Tapping knife

Important things to keep in mind while tapping neera is that the palms shall be healthy and the tapper should be skilled. Careful supervision shall be ensured from tapping to packing and everything



Preparation of anti ferment solution for neera tapping



Container filled with anti ferment solution

shall be done under strict hygienic conditions.

For ensuring the hygienic condition, prevent the contact of microbes with inflorescence by using disinfectant (three times in a day). Collecting vessels shall be



Neera packed by CIT

frequently cleaned. The application of sterilized clay with disposable hand gloves shall be ensured and the collecting vessel



Jaggery along with Mould

Coconut syrup and Honey



Final Stage of packing



First Stage of Bulk Packing

must contain anti-ferment liquid at appropriate level.

CIT is preparing various value added products from neera like jaggery, honey and syrup. We can use jaggery and syrup as sugar supplement. Jaggery is available in different size, shapes and weight. In the case of glycemic index, our products have a higher level of competitive advantage over existing products.

New Neera policy in the offing in Karnataka

Shri. Shamanur Shivashankarappa, Minister for Horticulture, Government of Karnataka has said that the State Government was examining the possibility of introducing a new Neera policy, by amending the Karnataka Excise Act.

In a written reply to C N Balakrishna of the JD(S) in the Legislative Assembly, he said that Neera comes under the Excise Act. It has to be taken out of the purview of the Act, by bringing in an amendment.

The government was consulting with experts in this regard, he said. As part of an effort to promote Neera as a health drink, the department has set up a Neera manufacturing unit at Tumbe horticultural farm in Dakshina Kannada district. Steps are being taken to sell Neera in sachets. The government has decided to hand over the operation and maintenance of the unit to the Palakkad Coconut Producers' Company, the minister said.