

# WHY THIS PRACTICE OF PLANTING AGED COCONUT SEEDLINGS IN GODAVARI AND KRISHNA DELTAS?

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**K**rishna and Godavari deltas lying on the east coast of Andhra Pradesh are the most fertile areas where nearly 80 per cent of the total acreage under coconut in the State is concentrated at present. The agro-climatic conditions are quite favourable for the raising of coconut, and area suitable for bringing under this crop is still available. The common practice in these areas is to plant three to four-year-old seedlings, locally known as 'Kuncham Manulu'. The recommendation of the State Department of Agriculture to use one-year-old seedlings is not yet found acceptable to the growers in these tracts.

Detailed enquiries made with some enlightened ryots about this practice reveals the following points in its favour.

1. By planting an aged seedling it is believed that the pre-bearing period is reduced considerably in the main field.
2. The soils being heavy and the rainfall high during monsoon periods, the drainage poses a serious problem. The establishment of aged seedlings under such conditions appears to be comparatively

better. Since the area of rooting surface is more in the aged seedling as compared to one-year-old seedling which has the nut still attached to the roots, the chance of survival of the aged seedling under the unfavourable conditions prevailing over a long period during the successive monsoons is likely to be more.

3. It is only with an aged seedling that deeper planting is possible in these heavy soils with high water table. One-year old seedling cannot be planted that deep as is done in other parts of the country.
4. It is also said that the aged seedling withstands cattle trespass, which is very common in these areas.
5. The maintenance cost is reduced considerably by planting an aged seedling.

Since the Government is not producing aged seedlings the entire demand is met by private nursery men who generally do not observe any selection of seed material in the nursery. Generally they manure and irrigate every seednut that germinates till it is sold. As such it is

difficult to make any differentiation with regard to the quality of the seedlings. Consequently, the percentage of distribution of nondescript seedlings is very high. Besides this system has also got the disadvantage of swelling the initial cost of investment as each seedling costs about Rs. 11/- to Rs. 12/- excluding the cost of transport which is prohibitively high and is also difficult. As such, the mobility of the seedlings is restricted to only shorter distances.

To plant an acre with sixty seedlings the cost may work out as high as Rs. 1000/- whereas it is less than Rs. 200/- with one-year-old seedlings.

In view of the great importance of this subject i.e., in furthering the plantation programme of coconut in this well-suited tract, it is highly desirable that some systematic trials are taken up in this tract to study and establish the desirability or otherwise of planting aged seedlings. In case the advantages attributed to this practice by the local people are well-founded, it is necessary to reorient the present nursery programme of the State Department of Agriculture.

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