

**COCO (A) NUTMEG - Growing money on trees**  
(*Current scenario in nutmeg production and challenges ahead*)

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In the event of global climatic changes in Caribbean countries especially in Grenada, there has been shortage in production of nutmeg. The demand for nutmeg on the other hand is increasing due to value addition and utilization in food processing, oleoresin and pharmaceutical applications. India is emerging as a major producer of nutmeg. Even though nutmeg is a humid tropical tree spice crop grown under rainfed conditions in Srilanka, Caribbean, Indonesia and other countries, Tamil Nadu, especially in the western parts viz., Pollachi, the crop is successfully cultivated as a mixed crop in coconut plantation under irrigation and fertigation.

The major advantage of this geographical location is that the quality of nutmeg is superior due to the aflatoxin free product. The characteristics of nutmeg depend heavily on the environment in which it is grown. The nutmeg plantations in India including Kerala are mostly seedling progenies and clonal plantations raised through orthotropic shoots. The major problems faced in these plantations are tall headedness added with very shallow root system, prone to uprooting of trees due to high rains coupled with wind.

Moreover, the handling operations including harvesting, foliar spraying are tedious due to non-availability of work force to carry out these farm operations, and hence it is very difficult to maintain the plantation in future in case the prices drop due to over production.

More over, the availability of quality planting material (Orthotropic budded plants) has become the major constraint. To address these problems, it is vital to switch over to improved methods like High Density Planting, planting vegetatively propagated plants using plagiotropic shoots used as scion, following scientific canopy management to get higher output. The Indian Institute of Spices Research, Calicut has successfully standardized epicotyl grafting in nutmeg which can be effectively utilized for the high density planting. This method standardized for the first time by IISR using epicotyle grafting is advantageous as large number of plants can be propagated from a single mother plant under one roof. Propagation through plagiotropic shoots, more number of grafted plants can be obtained from a single tree when compared to the orthotropic shoot multiplication.

The advantages foreseen in improved methods as suggested are easy cultivation operations like picking, foliar spray, convenience in regulating the fruit set and development through which more fruits of higher grade can be obtained. Pruning facilitates sun light to penetrate inside the canopy inducing photosynthesis for better harvest.

Under the HDP system, there is scope for planting nutmeg under trellis system also, which allows easy operations like hand harvesting and other farm operations. Such system is in practice in plantation crops like cocoa in countries like Australia.

Scientific interventions are required for standardizing the HDP which includes canopy management for optimized sunlight, nutrients and moisture. The nutmeg production warrants the need to improve the productivity. The farmers require quality planting materials who are now being exploited by private nurseries who supply inferior planting material without any pedigree. The prices of nutmeg may seem to be attractive today but in the event of over production and fall in prices, the farmers should make their mind to accept the loss, however the income from nutmeg is an additional income other than coconut. Under mixed cropping involving coconut and nutmeg, the per unit land is effectively utilized and higher returns are achieved.





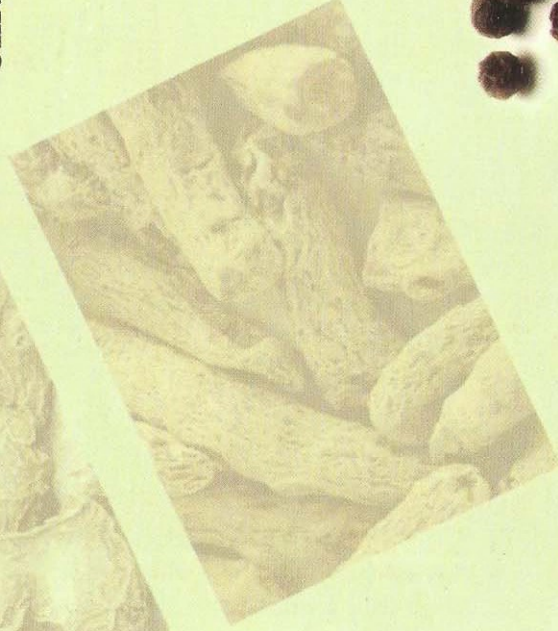
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