

Nuts about coconuts

■ MIGUEL BRAGANZA

It is mid-August, and it's time to give the latest 'state tree' of Goa some well-deserved attention. This is the time to dig around the tree and apply manure for its nourishment. In the uplands, especially in areas that have no irrigation facility, it is the time to plough between the coconut trees, to uproot and bury the weeds as well as to loosen the soil to trap the water from the receding south-west monsoon rains and the showers of the north-east monsoons or 'toddvopaus' that may come as a blessing.

Science calls us to modify our tradition a little. The coconut palm's roots grow about one and a half metre long and about as deep in the soil. These are fibrous roots

that must anchor the tree which grows with its crown ten to fifteen metres above the ground.

It is recommended that a ring be excavated around the tree but one to one and half metres away from the trunk. The soil touching the tree trunk is only cleaned of the weeds but otherwise undisturbed. The trench is about half a metre wide and thirty centimetres (one foot) deep. The excavation can be done manually or mechanically using a mini-excavator now available in Goa on hire.

The mini-excavator can be used to lay pipelines or manure trees with equal ease.

In a return to natural farming and organic practices, it is recommended that the trench base be covered with green leaves of *Glyricidia sepium* (Sareachem



The mini-excavator at Don Bosco College of Agriculture, Sulcorna

zaad) or *Getonia floribunda* (Uski). Coconut fibre, coconut husks and shredded pieces of coconut fronds are added to this. If wood ash is available, about five kilograms or one gamela full

of ash is applied. If not, one and half kilogram of the mined muriate of potash is applied along. Fish meal is hard to get and so one to three kilograms of rock phosphate, that is commonly



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available as 'uniphos' with the fertiliser dealers, is added.

One to five kilograms of compost is applied along with a teaspoonful of PSB or phosphate solubilising bacteria that helps to convert the unavailable phosphorus in the soil into a form

that the tree can take up through its roots. It is a good idea to add some *Trichoderma viride* to the compost to keep out soil-borne pathogens or disease causing micro-organisms. Let us do all this to have a healthy 'state tree' in Goa.

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