



Coconut Palm *Cocos nucifera*

06-03



<u>Hardiness</u>	<u>Exposure</u>	<u>Soil</u>	<u>Water</u>	<u>Flowers</u>	<u>Height</u>
Zones 8, 9, 12-24	Sun or shade	Tolerates many different soil conditions, excellent salt or drought tolerance	Moderate watering	Large edible fruit ranging in color from, green to yellow to orange	60 to 100 feet

The origins of this plant are the subject of debate with some authorities claiming it is native to southeast Asia, while others claim its origin is in north-western South America. Fossil records from New Zealand indicate that small coconut-like plants grew there as far back 15 million years ago. Even older fossils have been uncovered in Rajasthan, India. Regardless of their origins, coconuts have spread across much of the tropics, in particular along tropical shorelines. Since its fruit is light and buoyant, the plant is readily spread by marine currents, which can carry coconuts significant distances.

The coconut palm thrives on sandy soils and is highly tolerant of salinity and prefers areas with abundant sunlight and regular rainfall (75-200 cm annually), which makes colonizing the many shorelines of the tropics relatively straightforward. Coconuts also need high air humidity for optimum growth (70-80%+), which is why they are rarely seen in areas with low humidity (e.g. the Mediterranean), even where temperatures are not a problem. They are very hard to establish and grow in drier climates. Fruits collected from the sea as far north as Norway have been found to be viable and have subsequently germinated given the right conditions. In the Hawaiian Islands, the coconut is regarded as a Polynesian introduction, first brought to the Islands by early Polynesian voyagers from their homelands in the South Pacific.

The flowers of the coconut palm are polygamomonoecious, with both male and female flowers in the same inflorescence. Flowering occurs continuously, though only the female flowers produce seeds. Coconut palms are believed to be largely cross-pollinated, although some dwarf varieties are self-pollinating.