

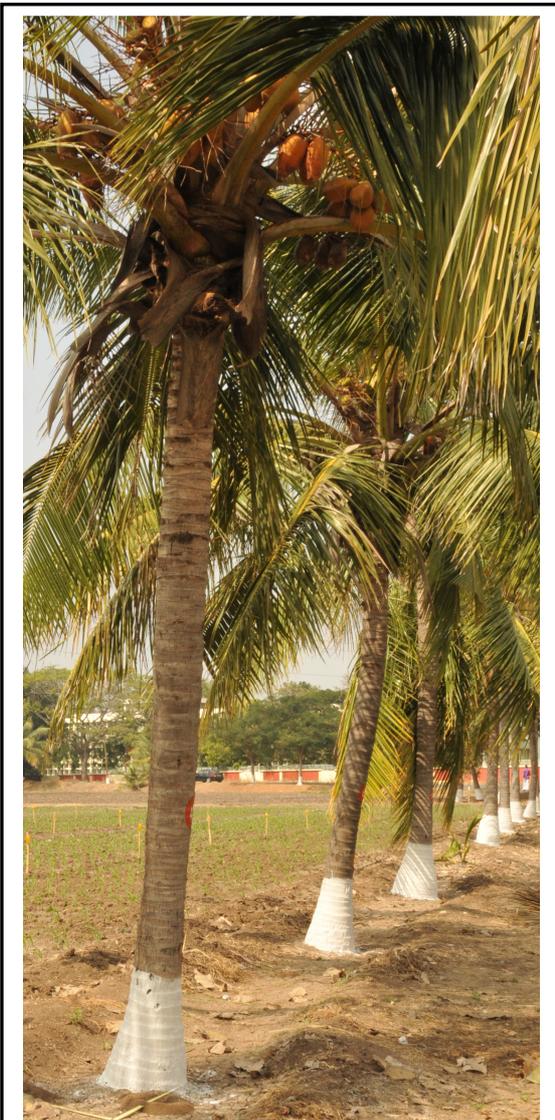
## KERALA

**State Tree:** Keram, Nalikeram, Thenga.

**Botanical Name:** *Cocos nucifera* L.

**Family:** Arecaceae.

**Common Names:** Khopra (Assam); Daav, Naikel, Nariyel (Bengali); Coconut, Coconut Palm, Coconut Tree (English); Koprun, Nairel (Gujarathi); Nariyal Gola, Nariyel-ka-ped (Hindi); Khobbari, Temgu (Kannada); Narala-maddo (Konkani); Karel, Mar, Varala (Marathi); Nariyal (Punjabi); Narikela (Sanskrit); Kopparai, Thengai, Tenkaimaram (Tamil); Narikelamu, Tenkay (Telugu).



**Cocos nucifera** L.

**Etymology:** In Greek 'kokkos' means berry; referring to the appearance of coconut fruits in clusters. In Portuguese word 'coco', means monkey; apparently referring to the resemblance of coconut fruits with the head or skull of a monkey; specific epithet 'nucifera' in Latin means nut-bearing (from 'fero' = bear and 'nux-nucin' = nut).

**Description:** A palm usually with solitary (rarely branched), straight and flexible stem, growing 30 - 40 m tall with scars of fallen leaves in semicircular rings and crowned by an apical cluster of huge pinnate leaves, 3 - 4 m long with linear-lanceolate rigid leaflets. Inflorescence a spadix, paniculate, subtended and enclosed in a woody spathe. Flowers unisexual; female flowers at the base of a spadix, generally solitary with

six sepals; male flowers numerous at the upper part of each branch. Fruit a drupe with 4 – 8 cm thick fibrous mesocarp and a woody endocarp enclosing fleshy kernel; endosperm watery, sweet.

**Flowering & Fruiting:** Throughout the year.

**Range of Distribution:** Indo–Pacific region.

**Economic Importance:** Oil from the nut is edible and also used in the manufacture of soap and candles; copra, obtained from the nut, used in confectionery; copra–residue used as fodder and manure; fibre from the husk, used for making carpets and ropes. Coir comes from the Malayalam word ‘kayar’ or ‘kayaru’, which mean cord, to be twisted. Coir industry is second to Agriculture as a source of employment in Kerala and it enjoys the status as the largest cottage industry in Kerala. Alappuzha (Alleppey) is the nerve centre of Kerala's famous coir industry, producing coir products, such as ropes, mats, mattresses and geo–textiles.

**Medicinal Uses:** Coconut milk, the endosperm of the fruit is refrigerant, nutrient, aperients, diuretic and anthelmintic. The water and tender pulp of unripe coconut is aperients, diuretic and destroys intestinal worms. It is also considered as aphrodisiac and diuretic. The oily exudation obtained from the shells is antiseptic and rubefacient. Flowers are astringent. Root is diuretic and used in uterine diseases.

**Traditional Uses:** Everything from Kerala's culture to its dishes is evolved around the coconut tree. Coconut is an essential element of rituals in Hindu tradition as they initiate the beginning of any new activity by breaking a coconut to ensure the blessings of the gods and successful completion of the activity. In Kerala, the coconut tree is



**Fruiting plant**

called "Kalpa Vriksham", which means all parts of a coconut tree are useful some way or

other. The artists of “Nagayakshi Kajam Ejuttu” tradition also use perforated coconut shells, filled with powder, having a variety of geometric designs for creating lines and decorative fill patterns. Ancient mural paintings in the cave temples of Thirunandikkara were prepared for painting by washing them with a solution containing tender coconut water and lime paste. Tender coconut leaves and red clothes are the materials for costume for the ‘Theyyottam’ – the most colourful and spectacular ritual theatre form of Kerala. Kathakali is usually performed in front of the huge ‘Kalivilakku’ (‘kali’ meaning dance; ‘vilakku’ meaning lamp) with its thick wick sunk in coconut oil. Traditionally, this lamp used to provide sole light when the plays used to be performed inside temples, palaces or abodes houses of nobles and aristocrats.

**Ceremonial Uses:** In Kerala, coconut flowers must be present during a marriage ceremony. The flowers are inserted into a barrel of unhusked rice (paddy) and placed within sight of the wedding ceremony. During Palm Sunday, Christians of Kerala use tender leaves of coconut tree for the ceremony. Malayankettu – an exorcist ritual practice in Kannur and Kasargode districts is performed to ward off evil spirits, especially in women during which the woman would be sitting in the pandal which is decorated with tender coconut leaves and flowers. Maritheyam – another exorcist ritual as well as dramatic performance practiced by the Pulaya community of Kannur district on the sixteenth day of the month of Karkidakam of Kerala calendar.

**Notes:** Kerala, or Keralam, got its name from ‘Kera’ (coconut). Coconut was once equivalent to cash in Kerala’s rural economy.

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