

AN ATTEMPT AT IDENTIFICATION OF THE EDIBLE AND SOME WILD SPECIES OF DIOSCOREA IN SRI LANKA

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Dioscoreas are usually cultivated in home gardens for their yams. In spite of the Dioscoreas being popular under coconut in small holdings, it is only during the last few years that some trials have been attempted along scientific lines. For successful intercropping, suitable species and varieties of Dioscoreas have to be selected and recommended for the different agroclimatic zones. This study was undertaken to collect, identify and evaluate the different Dioscorea cultivars available in Sri Lanka.

Living collections maintained at the Coconut Research Institute, were used in this study. Identification of the collected samples was based mainly on vegetative characters. Twelve such characters adapted from Santapau (1951) were used to characterise the different species and some of the cultivars. A total of 28 accessions were collected from various localities and grown at Lunuwila. These were identified as belonging to 6 different species. The three edible species along with some of the forms recognised are as follows : *Dioscorea alata* (Gugurala; Ini-ala; Jaffna purple; Jamburala; Kahata-ala; Kahata-angala; Khondhol; Kiri-Khondhol; Kiri-wal-ala; Lay-Dhantha; Panu-Khondhol; Raja-ala; Raja-walli; Raja-ini-ala; Ratna-walli and Ratu-Khondhol), *Dioscorea bulbifera* (Udala) and *Dioscorea esculenta* (Angili-ala; Hingurala; Kukul-ala; Katukukul-ala).

Accessions of the following wild species namely *D. pentaphylla*, *D. spicata* and *D. tomentosa* were studied from the living collections at Lunuwila and also from herbarium specimens at Peradeniya.