

## Role of seasoning mixtures in the process of tempering Kitul (*Caryota urens*) inflorescence

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Kitul sap is used for making treacle, jaggery, toddy and vinegar. The sap is obtained by seasoning inflorescence (flower) in immature stage. Use of seasoning mixtures is the predominantly employed method of seasoning a flower. The objective of the study was to identify different seasoning mixtures used and their role in the process of tempering (seasoning) a Kitul flower. A questionnaire survey was conducted in 12 Kitul growing districts (*Kandy, Matale, Badulla, Matara, Nuwara Eliya, Kurunegala, Ratnapura, Galle, Kegalle, Moneragala, Hambantota and Kalutara*) to collect data. A multi-stage stratified sampling scheme was adopted for sampling.

Flowers of some Kitul trees were easy to season. The natural mixtures such as black pepper-based and spice-based were used for seasoning of flowers in this type of trees. There were some Kitul trees their flowers were difficult to season with natural seasoning mixtures. Tappers tended to use strong and artificial mixtures for inducing sap flow of such difficult trees. Ash-based and slaked- lime mixtures were widely used for this purpose. Seasoning of flowers during rains is difficult since they cannot be exposed to the influence of sun. This problem has been overcome by using strong seasoning mixtures including ash-based and slaked-lime. Incorporation of strong herbal ingredients like *kunumella* (*Schleichera oleosa*), *ratnitoli* (*Plumbago indica* L.), *ruk-attana* (*Alstonia scholaris*) and *japala* (*Croton siglium*) in the seasoning mixtures. Such effects have given successful results during rains. Bee honey and slaked-lime, and bee honey and ash were two mixtures used for generating heat during rains as a substitute for warmth of sun which is necessary for successful seasoning a flower. Rubbing with a cut lime fruit and a leaf bundle of species such as *kududaula* (*Neolitsea cassia*

L.), *ankenda* (*Achronychia laurifolia*) and *kenhanda* (*Clerodendrum serratum*) was helped to get rid of sticky substances from the cut surface in the early stage of tapping. Once a seasoning mixture was deposited in the flower peduncle, it may be subjected to attack of monkeys and rats. Therefore, sealing of the seasoning mixture is advisable. Application of a cement paste and ash of a coconut husk has fulfilled this task. When a Kitul flower is seasoned, the growing seeds should be removed in order to prevent maturing of flower and also to prevent drawing of sap to the seeds. Washing the flower with water extract of garcena (*goraka*) or a solution of slaked-lime helped to shed growing seeds without bruises.