Cashew Nut Cultivation: Complete Guide

Cashew is a significant plantation crop extensively cultivated in coastal regions of India, including Kerala, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, and to some extent in Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, and the North-Eastern hilly regions.

The cashew tree yields various products with diverse applications. Cashew kernels are utilized as is or undergo value addition in confectionery and desserts. Cashew shells contain high-quality oil known as cashew nutshell liquid (CNSL), prized for its industrial uses. Residues from cashew shell extraction are utilized as fuel in processing units. Cashew apples can be consumed fresh, added to fruit salads, or used in various value-added products such as squash, jam, jelly, cider, fenny, chutney, and crisps. The seed coat serves as poultry feed. As of 2018-19, cashew is cultivated across 11.05 lakh hectares in India, yielding 7.43 lakh tonnes. India boasts 40 high-yielding cashew varieties suitable for cultivation.

Site Selection & Land Preparation

Cashew thrives in a wide range of soil types. Well-drained, non-saline, neutral to acidic soils are optimal. In non-traditional areas, soil and climatic suitability should be verified before cultivation. A mobile app for cashew suitability evaluation is available on Google Play Store. Areas with salinity, alkalinity, and waterlogging are unsuitable for cashew.

Clear wild growth, including forests and weeds, from the selected site. In hilly areas, terrace the land to prevent runoff and soil erosion.

Spacing and Pits

Normal spacing for planting cashew is 7.5 meters by 7.5 meters. Under high-density and ultra-density planting, spacing can be reduced, necessitating specific agro-techniques.

Dig pits 15 to 20 days before planting. Expose pits to sunlight to eliminate soil-bound pests, especially termites. Fill pits three-fourths full with a mixture of topsoil, compost or poultry manure, and rock phosphate. Provide side drains to prevent water stagnation.

A hedge row system with a spacing of 10 meters by 5 meters facilitates intercropping during the early years of cultivation. Suitable intercrops include ginger, turmeric, amorphophallus, pineapple, and various vegetables.

Planting and Pruning

Trailing crops like pepper and vanilla can be grown as companion crops. Healthy grafts should be planted carefully, ensuring the graft joint is at least 5 centimeters above ground level.

Provide stakes for newly planted grafts and mulch soil around plants for moisture conservation. Prune lower branches gradually to achieve a clear trunk. Regular pruning facilitates cultural operations, nut collection, and pest monitoring.

Manuring and Fertilizer

Regular weeding is essential for pest control and nut picking operations. Manure and fertilizer application should commence from the first year. An integrated approach combining organic and inorganic fertilizers enhances soil fertility and productivity.

Implement soil and water conservation measures, such as

terracing and mulching, to prevent erosion and conserve moisture.

High-Density Planting

High-density planting maximizes land utilization and early income generation. Pruning-responsive varieties should be selected. Continuous pest management is essential for disease and pest control.

Collect fallen nuts and sun dry them for 2-3 days before storage. Maintain nuts at least 4 inches above ground level in gunny bags.