



TRI UPDATE

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RECYCLING OF PRUNINGS

We are now in a position to quantify the economic gains from the practice of burying of prunings. Experiments conducted by the Institute show that incorporation of prunings enhances the cycle yield by about 800-1000 kg ha⁻¹.

As is commonly known, recycling of prunings is one of the practices needed for sustaining soil fertility and enhancing production. This practice also improves water and nutrient holding capacity of the soil.

The amount of prunings that is obtained depends on bush stand, clone, height of pruning and length of the pruning cycle. On a dry weight basis, approximately 16-20 t of prunings could be obtained from a 4 - 5 years pruning cycle.

There are two ways to recycle prunings. They could either be left on the soil surface or incorporated into the soil by cutting trenches in between the tea rows. When top soil (0-15 cm) is relatively loose and dark in colour, prunings could be left on the soil surface. If the slope of the land is greater than 70%, prunings could also be retained on the soil surface. Incorporation of prunings is beneficial for eroded compact soils.

For incorporation of prunings, trenches 30 cm (12") wide 15-22 cm (6"-9") deep and 3-4.5m (10'-15') long should be cut in the middle of the alternate rows along the contour in a staggered manner and the cut soil placed on the upper surface of the trench. Care should be taken not to

cut the thick storage roots. For seedling tea planted up and down the slopes and not planted along the contour, the length of the trench could be 1.5-3m (5'-10') depending on the slope. After chopping the prunings, the trenches should be closed. In this manner, about 60-70 % of the total prunings could be incorporated into the soil. The balance could be given as firewood to workers after allowing the leaves to be retained on the soil surface. If the workers clamour for firewood, an alternative would be to incorporate only the brush wood (leaves and twigs without the main branch) into the soil.

Incorporation of pruning into the soil should not be undertaken when the soil is very dry or during heavy rain. To incorporate prunings into soil in an extent of one hectare, about 100 man days are required.

For retention on the surface, prunings should be left between the tea rows. It is important that they do not damage the growing buds on the pruned frame.

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