

CHARACTERISTICS OF HOMEGARDENS IN THE KURUNEGALA DISTRICT

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Homegardens play a vital role in providing food related needs, timber and also cash through sale of produce for rural communities of Sri Lanka. It is essential to understand the homegarden practice before suggesting improvements to increase their productivity and sustainability. Hence the objective of this study was to examine the structure and composition of homegardens. General characteristics and species composition of homegardens in the Kurunegala district were evaluated.

Twenty five homegardens were selected randomly for the study from each of three agroecological regions DL₁, IL₂ and IL₃ that traverse through the Kurunegala district. Initial secondary data collection stage followed the vegetation survey to evaluate structure and composition of homegardens. In addition family members of these selected households were interviewed to identify potentials and constraints of the homegarden practices in the region.

Species richness of homegardens of DL₁ region was low when compared to other two regions. Based on the utility of dominant species found, five types of homegardens were identified coconut, timber, annuals, fruits and mixed perennials based gardens. Farmers indicated button and immature nut falling of coconut, immature flower falling and flower scorching of fruit trees caused mainly due to low and fluctuations of soil moisture content and low market price for seasonal fruits and scarcity of labour as barriers against the improvement of homegardens. Incorporating naturally regenerating tree species for low fertile lands and introducing commercial and other, tree and herbaceous species for gardens practicing soil moisture conservation measures and standard cultural practices are identified as potential interventions for improvement.