

## A NOTE ON THE "GROOMING" OF RUBBER TREES

By

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The correct procedure of carrying out the annual grooming of rubber trees which has been recommended within the last decade has not been clearly understood by a number of estate superintendents. In a few cases the type or time of grooming has been responsible for a high incidence of bark canker caused by *Phytophthora*. It is hoped that this note will clarify the many controversial points that have arisen in connection with this operation of estate sanitation.

The word "grooming" is specifically used, as opposed to scraping, to describe the operation of cleaning out lichens and mosses which develop on trees during the long periods of monsoonal wet weather.

This form of extraneous growth on the trunks of rubber trees is more common in damp and sheltered areas. These areas are obviously more susceptible to the incidence of wet weather diseases, especially if they are planted with clones which are susceptible to *Phytophthora* diseases.

Scraping produces cracks in the bark which in the wet season harbour undesirable fungous spores.

### **Advantages of Grooming.**

- (1) It helps in the collection of clean latex, especially during the dry periods when grooming prevents extraneous matter from falling off the bark into the cups.
- (2) In wet weather the jelly-like decaying mosses can acidify the rain water and cause pre-coagulation on the cuts and in the cups.
- (3) The groomed bark up to about a height of 6 to 7 feet from ground level retains less water during wet periods and helps in the early drying out of tapping panels.
- (4) The retention of infecting spores, such as those of *Phytophthora*, is greatly reduced when the bark is clean and dry.

### **Time of Grooming.**

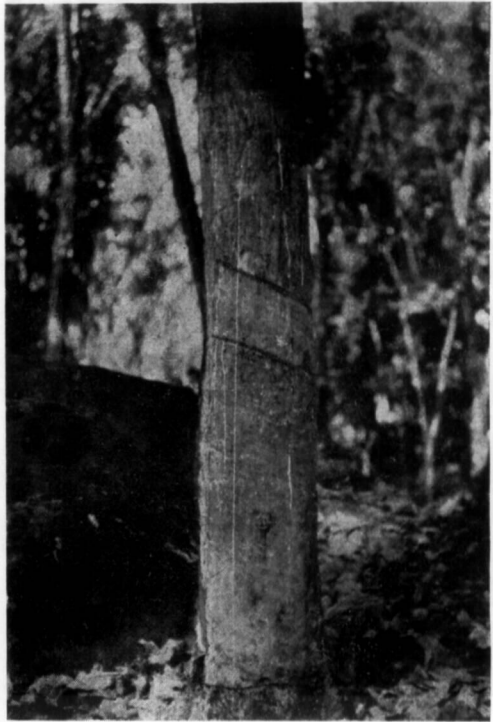
Grooming should be carried out well within a dry period. The most suitable time will be during the wintering period, especially on estates where the annual wintering rest period is observed.

In certain extremely wet districts it is possible that two groomings a year are necessary. This second grooming can be done in September when a reliable period

METHODS OF GROOMING  
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Correct Grooming  
Correct Grooming



Incorrect Grooming  
Incorrect Grooming

of dry weather can be expected but may cause certain difficulties with labour since the operation would have to be carried out when the trees are in tapping.

### **Method of Grooming.**

In order to avoid the incorrect methods of grooming, which really amount to taking off more than the very superficial corky layer together with the lichens and mosses, it is best not to use the type of metal scrapers favoured for Canker treatment.

A coconut husk of the correct shape and size for grooming can be made by shaving off a part of the inner fibre of the husk and bringing the hard outer covering to a fairly sharp edge; about a sixth part of a whole coconut husk would be sufficient for making one grooming implement.

In the dry weather the superficial layers of corky bark together with the lichens and mosses are so dried out that they begin to peel off naturally. It is then necessary only to groom these layers off up to a height of about 6 feet from ground level. The photographs show two trees which have been correctly and incorrectly groomed.

The danger of bark infection due to careless scraping, especially during wet weather periods, has been noticed on a number of estates which the writer was called upon to visit for heavy incidence of canker.

The use of the scraper, especially on seedling trees and certain clones with irregular bark may lead to a number of superficial wounds indicated by pin points of latex exudation on the scraped trunk, or by a considerable amount of latex drip down the stems from deeper bark injuries.

Special care should be taken when grooming renewed bark on the tapping panel. Injuries caused by careless grooming may lead to irregular callusing of renewed bark. These undesirable repercussions of incorrect grooming can be avoided with the minimum amount of supervision if a coconut husk is used instead of a metal scraper.

If the advantages of grooming are carefully explained to the tapper, he may be made to realize that this particular work of estate sanitation helps in the drying out of tapping panels and in preventing pre-coagulation in the field. He may then be favourably disposed to carry out this operation as a part of his tapping task.