

TEA RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF SRI LANKA

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GUIDELINES ON MEASURES TO BE ADOPTED IN TEA LANDS FOLLOWING A DROUGHT

It is absolutely essential that the following measures should be adopted in tea lands affected by a prolonged drought, in order to ensure optimal recovery of drought affected plants.

NEWLY PLANTED TEA (First and Second year fields)

1. Newly planted tea should be fertilized only after bud-break and when leaves of the new growth are fully open.
2. Bringing into bearing operations should be delayed until the plants have re-foliated adequately.
3. Assess the number of casualties in each newly planted field and resupply vacancies with quality nursery plants, prior to undertaking the normal replanting planned for the year. Extents which could not be planted in the season should continue to be under grass until planting in the following season.
4. If low shade trees such as Gliricidia, Dadaps have been affected, resupplying of shade or removal of dead branches may be necessary.

MATURE TEA

1. Fertilizer Applications

When favorable weather conditions set in after a period of prolonged drought, application of fertilizer should be carried out carefully.

Tea fields may have been affected by drought at varying levels and can be categorized as follows:

(a) Fields showing no symptoms of drought but low in shoot production

Fields in this category can be fertilized after a period of 02 - 03 weeks following the onset of monsoon and when bushes show obvious signs of flushing.

(b) Fields affected in parts i.e. by wilt as well as scorch and some defoliation

Such fields can be fertilized only after a period of about 06 weeks, depending on the extent of drought damage.

(c) Fields affected severely with extensive defoliation

Fields in this category should not be fertilized, until bushes have fully re-foliated, recovered and have commenced flushing, which process could take about 03 - 06 months.

2. Pruning

Pruning of drought-affected fields should be delayed until the following conditions are in place:

- (a) Bushes have recovered fully, and
- (b) Produced sufficient foliage ensuring the availability of adequate root reserves and good lungs that could be retained at pruning. It is best to rest such fields completely without plucking until fully recovered.

3. Plucking

- (a) Drought affected fields should be harvested only after bushes are fully recovered.
- (b) After a period of prolonged drought tea bushes are subjected to varying degrees of stress. Hence, with the onset of rains, adopt one or two rounds of light plucking, even in fields with bushes showing no obvious/visible signs of drought effects such as wilting and/or partial defoliation.
- (c) If, however, a significant number of bushes had wilted at some stage during the dry period and if some of which had shown partial defoliation, it is essential to completely rest such sections in the field. Any attempts to harvest should not be made at the first signs of flush.

4. Re-supplying vacancies

- (a) Priority for infilling should be given to young and newly planted areas and then to VP tea areas with good soil conditions. Robust and hardier nursery plants should be used to infill vacancies.
- (b) Vacancies in seedling tea should be planted with appropriate soil-reconditioning. After soil-reconditioning, infilling should be carried out with hardier specifically grown nursery plants, as already recommended for infilling normal vacancies in mature tea fields.

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