
Does Jojoba Have Potential In The Tropics

In each of the countries I visited last spring (Honduras, Costa Rica and Colombia) I found interest in trying jojoba. It is hardly surprising. A desert shrub that produces acorn size seeds containing 40% oil that sells \$200 per gallon is interesting indeed! The following item will give more basic information on jojoba. Here I want to help you decide whether to try jojoba in your area and, if so, on what scale to try it.

Native jojoba plantations can be found in areas with less than 12 inches of rain per year, but inadequate seed may be produced under these conditions. Optimal growth occurs with 15-18 inches. It will probably be unsuited for your area if there is over 30 inches of rain.

It is a temptation to plant jojoba on a large scale right away, because it takes 3-5 years for plantings to begin production. By the time smaller test plots were mature, the exceptionally high prices that accompany the present shortage of seed may be substantially lower. Indeed, I was shown several hundred acres in northern Costa Rica that had been planted by a group of investors. But Dr. Leon at CATIE mentioned that it was not known whether the plants will produce seed in more equatorial latitudes or what other problems might occur. He urged caution until more is known. You could lose credibility among those you work to help if you built up their hopes only to find the plant would not bear seed. Upon my return I inquired as to who were the leading experts in jojoba, then phoned them.

Dr. Lemoyne Hogan is with the University of Arizona. He has a former student in Brazil who has five year old plants growing south of the equator. They are flowering and fruiting, so he is sure that long day length is not a requirement to get fruit. Reports based on greenhouse work in Australia had suggested that some cold was needed. This also is apparently not a requirement. He stressed that jojoba is not suited if rainfall is over 30 inches or if soils are poorly drained. One of the two big sites he visited in Costa Rica had poor drainage and the other was in poor sand. He has seen projects in other countries with similar problems. An Australian project is in dunes and beach sand. He stressed that jojoba does need nutrients. I mentioned the temptation to plant widely rather than do trials first. He replied, "They had better do trials! That's what I keep urging people. It is crazy."

Dr. Yermanos is with the University of California at Riverside. He said jojoba will bear fruit in the tropics, but no one knows what yields can be obtained. He is growing it at low latitudes, but they are all young plants. They do have flowers and seeds however. Not even in our latitude where jojoba is native are there commercial plantations in production. Though there are now 20,000 acres of 1 - 3 year old

jojoba plantations, it will be several years before we really know its potential. "Our advice is to start with small plantings." Asked about the large planting in Costa Rica he replied, "The general idea is that it is more of a fiasco. How does one justify it?"

If you believe that jojoba might have potential in your area, I encourage you to begin now to do some modest scale experimentation.