WHICH SIZE TARO TO PLANT?

By R. Michael Bourke, Agronomist, Lowlands Agricultural Experiment Station, Keravat

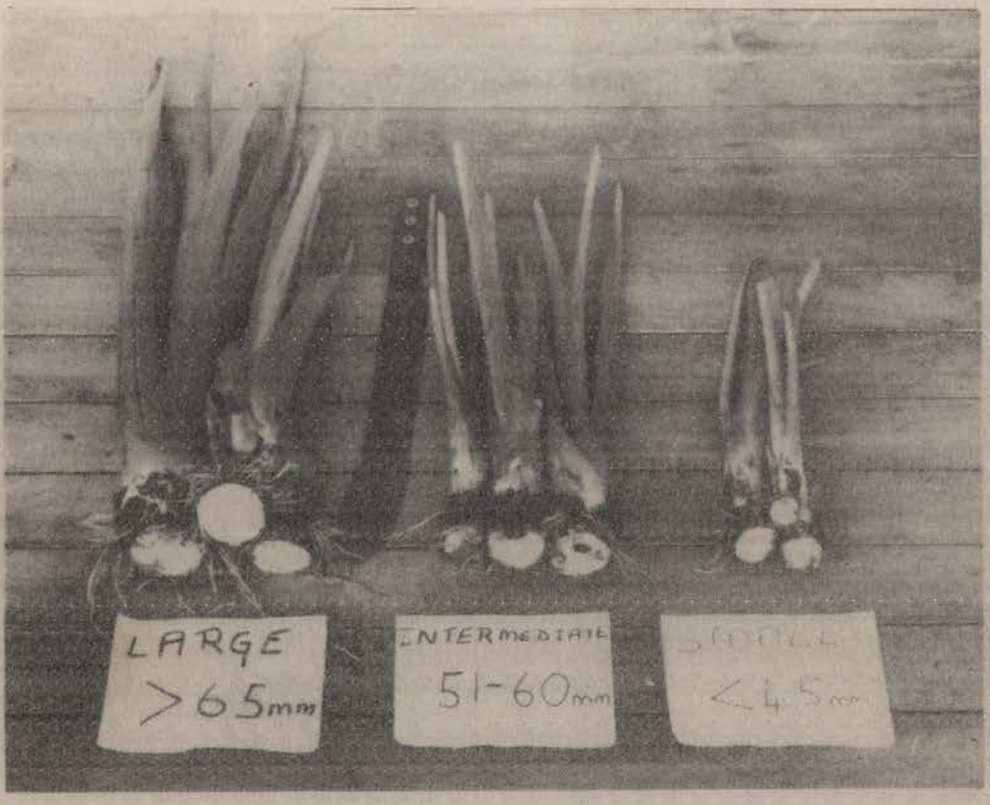
Experiments at Keravat have shown that it is better to plant pieces from larger taros, because these grow faster. They also give a bigger taro crop.

Taro is normally propagated by setts. These consist of the lower 30 to 50 cm of the petiole with the leaf blade removed together with the top centimetre or so of the corm. Four experiments at Keravat have been done to compare different sized planting material for taro. In two of the experiments, three sizes of setts were compared. These were large, medium size and small.

We found that fewer plants died using large and medium size setts. As well, average yield per plant and total crop yield were greater from large and medium size setts than from small setts. The results in the *Table* below show this.

As well as the effect on plant deaths and yield, our experiments have shown that the size of the sett affects the size of the plant. Larger setts grow faster, are taller, and have more leaves and have larger leaves. This is important because larger plants shade out the weeds better and the farmer does not have so much work weeding the taro.

The effect of sett size occurs on many taro varieties. It does not occur with one or two only.



The three sizes of taro setts used in one of the Keravat experiments. Intermediate means middle-sized.

Effect of sett size on plant death and yield.

		Large setts	*Medium size setts*	*Small setts*
No. of plants per ha that died	Trial 1	560	560	1 820
	Trial 2	1 880	2 450	3 470
Yield kg/ha	Trial 1	9 440	8 340	7 550
	Trial 2	6 080	5 650	3 860
Average corm weight g	Trial 1	790	720	660
	Trial 2	730	750	600

The experiments have shown that a farmer should plant the largest setts available. This is because large setts grow faster, shade out weeds better, fewer plants die and they give a larger yield.

Work overseas and at Keravat has shown that larger planting material is better than smaller material for a number of other crops propagated by vegetative material. These crops include Chinese taro (taro kongkong), pineapples, white potato and yams.

NEW SPC HANDBOOK—CITRUS

The latest title in the SPC Handbook series—*Citrus Production in the South Pacific*—is now available. The need for a simple, practical guide to citrus production was recommended by participants in the Technical Meeting on Tropical Fruits held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands; this handbook, compiled with the close co-operation of those technical experts who attended that meeting, is intended to fulfil that need.

Illustrated with black and white photographs, the handbook provides pertinent information on: citrus types; production of young trees; establishment, management and maintenance of a citrus orchard; major pests and their control; harvesting and preparation for market. One chapter deals with the nutritional aspect of citrus and includes a selection of simple recipes. The pomelo, a citrus now gaining popularity in some Pacific areas, is also described in an annex. Although intended mainly for small farmers, extension and agricultural officers, this handbook should also be of assistance to those people who may be interested only in planting a few citrus trees to provide an additional source of income or just provide fruit for the immediate family.

Inquiries concerning this handbook should be sent to

SPC Publications Bureau,
P.O. Box 306,
Haymarket NSW 2000,
Australia.