WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE COCONUT?

1. How can you tell a coconut palm from any other palm?
   By its coconuts.

2. What is a coconut?
   Both the seed inside the husk and the whole fruit, including the husk, can be called a coconut, just as a walnut can be either the whole thing or just the nut inside the husk.

3. How far North will coconuts grow?
   Not in the Arctic or Antarctic, nor anywhere else in the United States but the tip of Florida, south from Ft. Pierce and St. Petersburg. Not out in the 'Glades.

4. What is its chief commercial use in the Pacific?
   As food. The meat is eaten, the milk is drank, edible oil is made from the meat, palm toddy and palm sugar are made from its sap. Also its fibers and leaves are useful.

5. What is its chief commercial use here?
   Its ornamental, landscape value. The nuts are sold for their meat and milk and to be carved into masks and other souvenirs. Its leaves are woven into ornamental mats.

6. How do you know when a coconut has "milk" in it?
   By shaking it.

7. How many buds has a coconut palm and where are they?
   There is only one, a gigantic one, at the base of its crown of leaves.

8. What do the Pacific Islanders do with coconut sap?
   Drink it when fermented as coconut toddy or coconut wine.

9. How do they get it?
   By cutting off every day the tip of the flower cluster which "bleeds" profusely into a bamboo bucket fastened to it. The toddy gatherers climb the trees and go from one to the other on bamboo bridges and cut off a thin slice of the young flower cluster to keep it "bleeding."

10. How far from the sea will coconuts grow?
   A hundred miles or so—but it doesn’t do so well there.

11. At how high an altitude will they thrive?
   At 2,000 feet it produces too little oil to be profitable.

12. What do they call the dried meat of the coconut?
   Taken out of the cracked shell and dried it is called copra. Often it is smoked to dry it more quickly. Copra is shipped to the oil mills and the oil extracted.

13. What is inside the coconut after it has started to grow?
   A white, spongy mass as large as one’s fist. This is called the haustorium and is good to eat. It absorbs the meat of the coconut and converts into invert sugar which feeds the germinating plant before its roots get into the soil. The Fijians hang coconuts in trees to germinate.

14. What can be made out of the husks?
   Fibers for rough ropes and cheap floor mats especially for use on ships are made from the husks and they can be used for fuel. Here, they are in demand for carving cheap souvenirs.

15. What is the timber of a coconut palm like?
   Pithy, like a corn stalk, with tough fibers and a hard outer shell. Not suitable for cabinet work, but is used for posts and framing of thatched huts. Decays quickly. When sawed lengthwise, it has a nice grain and can be polished and used for paneling.
16. What do native peoples make of the leaves?
Baskets, mats, hats, raincoats, shades for young plants to be grown under, rough umbrellas, thatched roofs for their houses.

17. Will the meat of a coconut burn?
Yes, natives of the tropics often use the dried meat for fuel, as it is rich in oil.

18. How does the coconut palm compare in beauty with other trees?
It ranks as one of the most beautiful trees in the world.

19. How can you tell the age of a coconut—by counting its rings?
It has no rings of growth as ordinary trees do and you have to guess by its height.

20. Will a coconut float?
Yes, of course. It floated across oceans.

21. How would you sprout a coconut?
Lay the unhusked coconut in a trench in the shade and almost, but not quite, cover it with earth and keep it moist.

22. Are there many different kinds of coconuts?
Yes, there are many kinds. There are the giant-fruited "Ninos," dwarf ones, "Makapunos" with jelly instead of milk inside them, edible-husked "Nawasi," and the "King," or golden coconut, etc., etc.

23. What is the easiest way to pick a coconut off its stem?
Twist it off with your hand.

24. Does a coconut palm have flowers?
Certainly. The big clusters of tiny white flowers are at first enclosed in long green spathes, which burst open and let the flowers come out like an ivory-colored cascade.
25. Does it have both male and female flowers?
Yes. The male flowers are at the tips of the branches of the clusters and the bud-like female flowers are near the bases. It is pollinated by the wind and produces much pollen.

26. Do bees like the flowers?
Yes, they are fond of the honey to be found in the male flowers.

27. Does the coconut palm have diseases?
Lots of them. Bud rot, scale insects, nematodes in the trunks and caterpillars that eat the leaves when young, badly disfiguring the palm.

28. When is the coconut milk fit to drink?
When coconut is about two-thirds full grown.

29. How do you open it when you want to drink the milk?
Chop a slice off the stem end with a machete or axe.

30. How do you open it to get the meat?
Strike it lengthwise with a machete. If many are to be opened, stick a plow-share upright in the ground, or a very sharp, hard stick. Bang the husk down on it hard, then give it a twist sideways and tear off the husk, one-half at a time. At one time Mr. Matheson had a foot-controlled machine that split the husks open.

31. Will you kill a coconut palm if you water it with salt water?
No. At least not after it is 8 or 10 feet high.

32. Are pearls ever found inside coconuts?
About one in a million coconuts may contain a pearl. It seems to form only in the so-called "blind" coconuts in which the three pores at the end of the shell were closed. There is one at the Fairchild Tropical Garden, in the Museum.

33. What is a coconut crab?
It is a huge crab, found in the islands of the Pacific and it is supposed to climb the coconut trees and break off the nuts and then climb down and eat the meat. There is a specimen of one in the Fairchild Tropical Garden Museum.

34. Where does the name "coconut" come from?
Dr. Gifford said it came from "Cocos," a monkey because the end of a husked nut with the three pores looks like the face of a little monkey.

35. Have the shells any commercial use?
In World War I the charcoal made from them was used extensively in gas masks.—D.F.

A NEW HERB

Those of us who like to cook with herbs have been seeing on the grocery shelves for the last year or so a new herb, labeled oregano. Trying it out in stews and soups, we found it to be similar to our old standby, thyme, but with a bit more pungency. It has found a favorite spot on the spice shelves of a good many cooks.

An article in Horticulture for January, 1951, by Gertrude B. Foster, editor of The Herb Grower Magazine, tells us some interesting facts about oregano, which is a trade name, not recognized by botanists. A good deal of detective work, plus experimental plantings, has established that the oregano from the grocery is a type of Origanum vulgare, or wild marjoram.

A plant sometimes sold as oregano, but an entirely different species, could be of special interest to us here in Florida. It is "an aromatic coleus, Coleus amboinicus, which is packaged as Spanish thyme or oregano and has a similar pungency in leaf and flowering tops. It is also perennial, but requires hot moist conditions, and must be wintered indoors" in the north. This is a chance for South Florida gardeners to try out something new, since Coleus grows here with small care.