

TRADITIONAL CRAFT MATERIALS OF GUYANA



A Directory

TRADITIONAL CRAFT MATERIALS OF GUYANA: A DIRECTORY

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L – Lokono (Arawak)
M – Makushi
W – Wapishana
WW – Warrau



GLOSSARY

L – Lokono (Arawak)
M – Makushi
W – Wapishana
Wu – Warrau

INTRODUCTION

Traditional craft materials serve as the threads that connect past, present and future generations to the land. Many Indigenous crafters rely on their natural surroundings– the forests, wetlands and savannas – for the materials needed to create their craft for art and utility.

Crafters use materials such as clay, cotton and leather, and leaves and fibres harvested from various local plants. As traditional lifestyles change due to increasing access to non-Indigenous cultures and younger generations moving toward more modern convenience, there are concerns related to the transmission and safeguarding of knowledge related to traditional craft materials.

Transmitting and safeguarding this knowledge is becoming more pressing, not only for the craft that the materials are used for, but also for the connection back to nature. The management and conservation of traditional craft materials contributes to the sustainable development of Indigenous communities and the conservation of their environment.

The development of this directory is aimed at helping to safeguard the knowledge on key plant species used in traditional craft and documenting some traditional knowledge for these species, including Indigenous names and traditional beliefs.

Information was gathered with craftswomen and craftsmen from villages in Regions 1, 3 and 9 who were engaged in the project Conserving Nature through Traditional Craft and Culture in Guyana funded by the National Geographic Society. The natural history descriptions of the plant species are based both on traditional knowledge of the crafters and scientific descriptions from databases such as the Kew Gardens Global database, Useful Tropical Plants Database, Encyclopaedia of Life, Palmpedia, Plants for a Future, and work of Tinde van Andel [1].

AROWA

Family: Arecaceae

Scientific name: *Attalea* spp.

Local name: Arowa

Indigenous names: Arowa (M), Chawidí (W)

Habitat: The Arowa palm is found in sandy well drained soils in open savanna.

Known distribution in Guyana: Distribution verified through observations in Central and South Rupununi, Region 9.

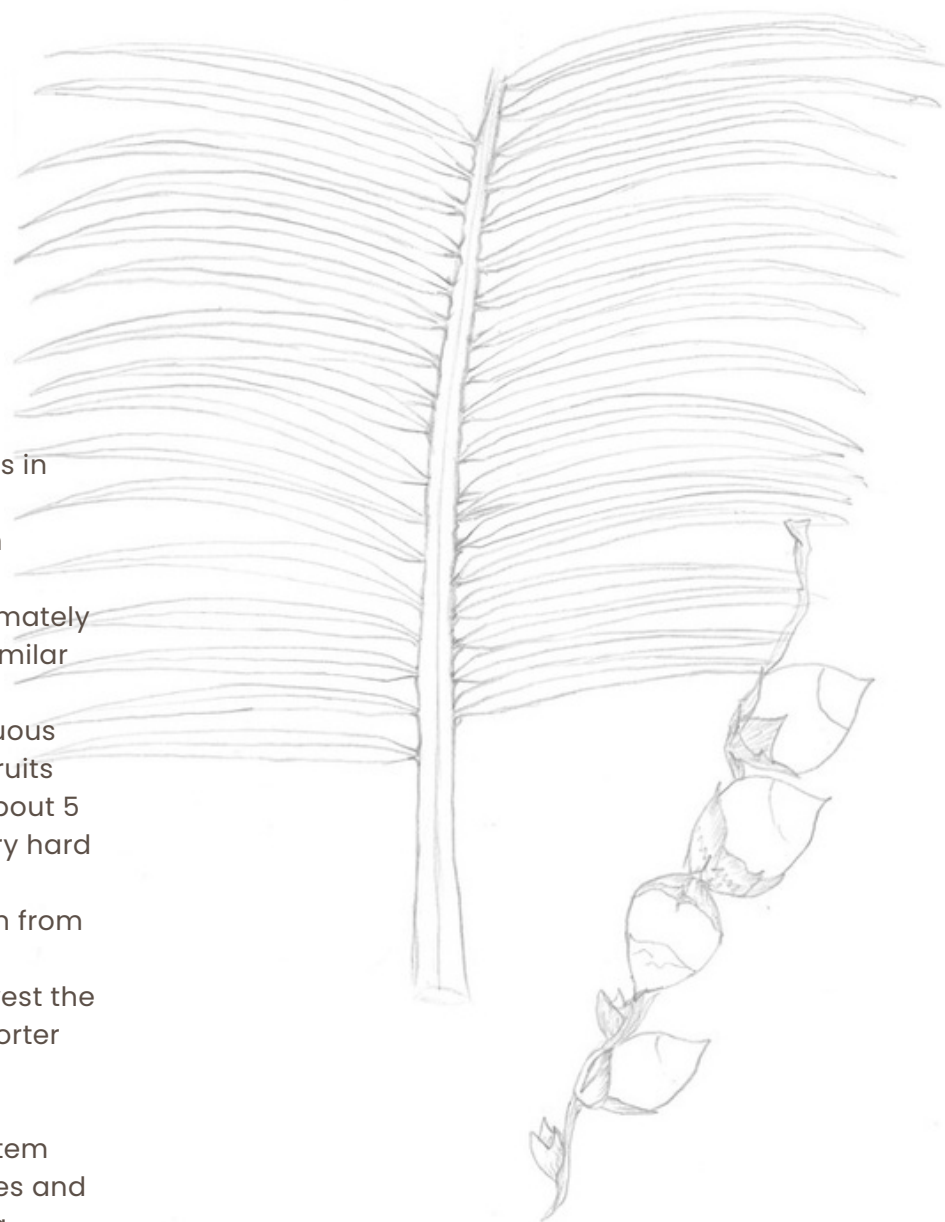
Description: Solitary evergreen palm that grows to approximately 20 m in height. It has a single trunk and topped by fronds similar to coconut trees. The leaves are pinnate and can be 6–15 in number and 2 m long. The flowers are small and inconspicuous and found in a dense cluster and are greenish yellow. The fruits are in clusters and look similar to Kokorite fruits. They are about 5 cm in size, and cream-brown in colour. The seed have a very hard shell. Green fruits are seen in December.

Flowering Season: Flowers are seen during the rainy season from May to June but may change depending on location.

Harvesting: Long ago people used to climb the tree to harvest the spires, but now they are harvesting spires from younger, shorter plants.

Propagation: Seed

Uses: The Arowa is used as an alternative to Kokorite. The stem can be used for making spindles for cotton spinning, handles and arrows. The flower bracket is used to grate cassava, make a baby's bed and set nests for chickens to hatch their eggs. The fruit is not fleshy, but the nut is used to make hair oil.





ARROW CANE

Family: Poaceae

Scientific name: *Gynerium sagittatum*

Local name: Wild Cane

Indigenous names: Ihi (L), Pireu' ye' (M), Bairii (W), Atabu (Wu)

Habitat: Open spaces with moist, rich sandy or loamy soil, rich in humus.
Grows on dry lands.

Known distribution in Guyana: The Arrow Cane is found wherever it is planted. Distribution verified by plant collections are in Regions 1, 3, 4, 8, 9. The plant has been seen as far as below King William's Fall and Powis Creek on the Essequibo River, believed to have been planted during the balata bleeding days.

Description: The arrow cane is a fast-growing reed-like tall grass that can grow up to 10 metres (takes one year) and in a considerable dense mass of vegetation. The stem is straight and erect. The leaves are long and slender with parallel vein. The lower part is covered by the casings from fallen leaves. The middle part is covered with leaves arranged in fan shaped groups. The upper part is round and thin, stiff on the outside and soft on the inside. They develop a large bloom on the top.

Flowering season: The plant flowers once a year. Flowering has been recorded at different times in at least three locations – March to April (Rupununi, Region 9), December start shooting again; September to October (Santa Rosa, Region 1); July – August (Santa Arattack, Region 3). Flowering maybe be based on when the Arrow was planted.

Harvesting: Harvesting is dependent on the bloom. When the flower dries it is ready for harvesting.

Propagation: Wind distributed seeds, root cutting and division of rhizomes. The plant will regrow if burnt but if the rhizome is destroyed by underground fire, it will not regenerate. It will also regrow a single stem after the cane is cut.





Uses: The unjointed upper section is used in making arrows. The fine side is for attaching the fletching or feathers; the fatter side is used to attach the point – some use the cane with the same diameter throughout. The cane can be used for kite making. The cane is also used in costume and flower making. Some may cultivate the plant as a fence.



AN INTERESTING FACT

Toka community members in Region 9 identify 3 types of arrows on their land. One they say is round and hard and does not break easily. The second is round but softer. The third is flatter in appearance but is hard and used to make the spear. They can be found in the swamps around the mountains. The arrow was transplanted to the mountains around Toka when people retreated from the savannas following the 1969 Rebellion.



SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

When moving the plant, you need to take tobacco and talk to the plant. When you take out the plant you cannot take it directly to the location. You have to move it in stages. When re-planting you need to go early, without eating and go in the sun or it will turn back on you and you will get 99 abscesses. If planting in the afternoon do not turn back otherwise you will get sore eyes.

Roast arrow with Kunami (poison) and a little fat to catch fishes like Dare and Tibicuri. Arrow will help it float; the fat attracts the fish. It would also affect turtles.

Long time ago, mothers would burn arrow cane and use the ash on the baby's navel to help heal it quickly.



ASCITAR

Family: Arecaceae

Scientific name: *Desmoncus orthoacanthos* (larger forest species),
Desmoncus polyacanthos (smaller savanna species)

Local name: Ascitar, Small Leaf Kamwari, Hold-me-back

Indigenous names:

Forest Ascitar: Kamwari (L), Kamowa (M), Kamowara (W)

Savanna Ascitar: Weheyo (L), Wayape (M)

Habitat: Upland forest, along waterways, seasonally flooded savannas, understory of forest, lowland forest on terra firma, flood forest, coastal forest, scrub forest near the sea, high elevation, secondary forest, forest margin and forest gaps.

Known distribution in Guyana: Distribution verified by collections from Regions 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9.

Description: Ascitar is a vinelike palm growing up to 10–12m and is covered in spines along the stem and underside of the leaves, a predator defence mechanism. The number of spines is dependent on the amount of light and water. In light, wet places the palm is tall and heavily spined and in shady dry places smaller and less spined. The stems, green or greenish brown in colour, may grow single or in clusters that are unbranched. The size of the stem is based on the amount of light and water the palm receives. The leaves are pinnate with a number of long, pointed leaflets along a central stalk. The end of the leaves are modified into climbing structures that look like grappling hooks. All parts of the leaves are covered in spines about 1 cm long. The flowers are usually white or cream coloured and may have a mild fragrance. They are typically small and inconspicuous and arranged in a clustered inflorescence. The flowers are often unisexual. The fruit is a small round berry in appearance. It ripens from green to yellow, orange and finally red. The savanna species has red fruit, observed in December.





SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

The Makushi used the Ascitar to lose their enemies; you split the Ascitar in half and pass through and close it behind you and your enemy would not be able to find you. The only way for them to find you would be to find the palm and open it again.

Do not harvest when flowering as it is not good to use.

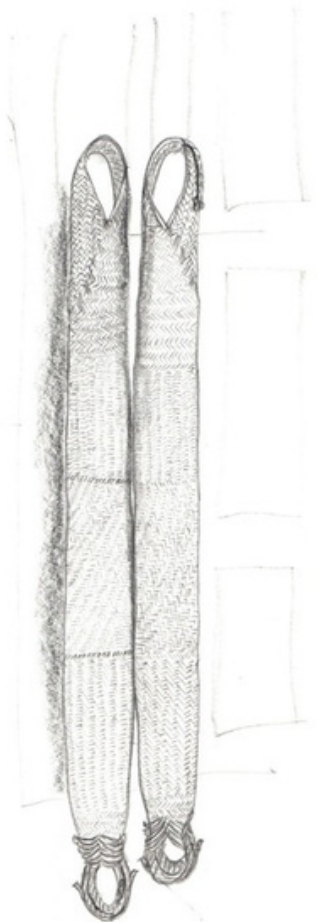
Break the pimpla (spine) of the Ascitar and insert into a wart in a cross fashion and a week later it will turn to dust.

Flowering season: The palm begins to flower at the start of the rainy season (May to June) and continues into the dry season. It has been seen flowering in August – September in Toka (Region 9).

Harvesting: When the leaves start drying the plant can be harvested; if too young the material will be too brittle to work with and can break. Elders generally judge by its length on when to harvest, with plants with about 6m length used to make matapees and those that are shorter and straighter used to plait shumbas and sifters.

Propagation: Seed dispersed by birds.

Uses: Used for weaving different types of baskets, sifters and matapees, and for framing the mouth of baskets and warishis. Elders in Toka (Region 9) used to strap tobacco bundles with Ascitar. The Wapichan use the dried seed to make local traditional wear. The fruit maybe eaten, used as fish bait and as protection against bats.



AWARA

Family: Arecaceae

Scientific name: *Astrocaryum vulgare*

Local name: Awara

Indigenous names: Awara (L), Awara ye' (M), Wazi (W)

Habitat: Awara can be found in the understory of tropical rainforests where it thrives in humid, lowland areas of well drained soils. It can be found in low vegetation cover, open fields and secondary forest and pastures.

Known distribution in Guyana: Distribution verified by collections in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9.

Description: The palm is densely covered in flattened, black spines of various length measuring up to 3 cm. The plant can grow a single trunk or have multiple trunks grown in a cluster to a maximum height of 15-20 m. Multiple trunks allow the tree to regenerate quickly if damaged by fire. The trunk is usually slender about 20 cm in diameter. The top is crowned with 8-16 stiffly erected leaves that can be 6 m long. The leaves are pinnate (feather like). The plant is slow growing and takes up to 8 years to fruit. The fruit is a reddish orange colour when ripe, with a fibrous fleshy pulp and round with a central stone. The seed is a large nut with a very hard woody shell, which is almost black in colour. The flower is small and inconspicuous and clustered together in dense inflorescences. They are usually white to cream in colour.





Flowering season: Flowers mainly during the rainy seasons from May to June and November to December. Indigenous communities usually see two crops per year in May/June and December.

Harvesting: The young shoot is harvested for craft, usually on a sunny day. The fruit needs to drop first before picking.

Propagation: Propagation is by seed which take up to two years to germinate. The plant also regrows from the root if cut or damaged by fire.

Uses: The ribs of the leaves are used to make fans for baking cassava bread and parching farine. The strips from the leaves can also be used to make hats. It is used to make spinning tops called taapo in Wapichan. These spinning tops are the wazi shell with a handle on it that is pulled by a string to make a flute-like sound. The seed is used to make jewellery such as black rings. The fruit is also used to make oil.

SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

If Awara is harvested in the rainy season, the straw will mildew.

It is used to make hand bands for babies, so that when they plant cassava, it will produce solid roots not watery ones.



A TRADITIONAL STORY



The black ring was used by slaves and natives as a symbol of marriage as they could not afford gold. The ring is also used as a symbol of friendship and of resistance to the established order to identify freedom fighters. The rings were later worn by Catholic missionaries to show solidarity with the poor and to support them in their struggle for equality.



CALABASH

Family: Bignoniaceae

Scientific name: *Crescentia cujete*

Local name: Calabash

Indigenous names: l'da (L), Arapi ye' (M), Korowachi (W), Mataro (Wu)

Habitat: The Calabash can be found in a variety of habitats but typically prefers warm, humid conditions on well-drained soil including disturbed areas, dry lowlands in clearings, and coastal clearings.

Known distribution in Guyana: Distribution verified by collections in Regions 1, 2, 4, 5, 9.

Description: The Calabash is a tall (6-12 m), slow growing tree with long branches spread horizontally with limited secondary branching. The leaves are long, lanced shaped and tapered at the base. They are evergreen and 15-30 cm long. They are alternate or in clusters on short shoots. The flower is funnel-shaped with five petals, light green in colour with purple streaks. They are single or in clusters. They have a pungent smell and are pollinated by bats. The fruit has a hard green shell and is spherical in shape. The inside of the fruit is a white poisonous pulp with thin dark seeds. They can grow up to 50 cm in diameter.

Flowering season: Flowers all year but does not flower until fully mature.

Harvesting: Can be harvested at any time when the skin is green.

Propagation: Seed and cuttings

Uses: The calabash is used for storage, utensils (spoons) and musical instruments. Artists use the calabash to create decorative craft; the dried calabash can be painted and scored with any type of design from animals to abstract (free form).





COTTON

Family: Malvaceae

Scientific name: *Gossypium* spp.

There are many varieties of cotton that can be found in the hinterland and coastal communities. There are both white and brown versions of these varieties. If planted close together the brown (Arauta) and white cotton cross pollinate producing a creamish to moca coloured cotton boll. Some of the varieties may not have local names because of the hybridisation.

Local name: Forest Cotton

Indigenous names: Yahoo (L), Katoka (M), Kinaridi (W), Ukobota (Wu)

Known distribution in Guyana: Various varieties are known to be cultivated in Region 9.

Varieties are also seen growing wild in Region 4 along the coast.

Habitat: Cotton grows wherever it is planted but most people plant in sandy, well drained areas.

Description: The cotton plant is a shrub that typically grows 1.5 m to 3.5 m tall. The leaves are broad and lobed, with a distinct green colour. Some varieties, like the Big Eye, have purple leaves. The leaves are arranged alternately along the stem. The flowers of the cotton plant are usually white or yellow and bell shaped. The Big Eye has a pink flower. The flowers develop into a fruit called a cotton boll. The cotton boll is a round spiky capsule that contain the seeds surrounded by the soft fibre.

Flowering season: Flowers have been witnessed from March to April. Cotton bolls open in May/June. Flowering is dependent on when the tree was planted, and estimated to start about 8 months after planting.

Harvesting: The cotton bolls are ready to pick when they open up. They are handpicked. Some may use a small knife to cut the boll off the plant.

Propagation: Grown by seed, and each type (brown and white) is planted with some distance between the two as planting close together would produce a hybrid cotton. Planting occurs at the start of the rainy season at the end of March into April.



BABOON BIG EYE



BABOON SINGLE EYE



WHITE BIG EYE



RAT EYE



REGA



REGA YUNG NUBU





Uses: The cotton fibre is spun to make thread which is then used to make hammocks, baby slings and other cotton clothes. The thread is also used in the making of arrows and other craft items. The various varieties are mixed before spinning e.g. the White Big Eye variety is mixed with Rega. Cotton is used in some traditional healing ceremonies and traditional medicines.



SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

When planting, use snail shell (bîbî) to dig the hole and you will have big bearings.

Parents would pick the first cotton for young women to spin in isolation, and for young women to do first harvest they need to be blessed and painted with annato.

Young women are taken in the forest, and their hands are wrapped in spider webs so the skills can stay with them (to be a talented cotton spinner).



KOKORITE

Family: Arecaceae

Scientific name: *Maximiliana maripa*

Local name: Kokorite

Indigenous names: Kokoriti (L), Maripa ye' (M), Pokoridi (W), Doi arau (Wr)

Habitat: Kokorite thrives in humid, lowland areas with well drained soils. It is often found along riverbanks, floodplains, and swampy or marshy areas. It can be found in both primary and secondary forest as well as disturbed habitats like forest edges and clearings.

Known distribution in Guyana: Distribution verified by collections in Region 1, 6, 8, 9.

Description: The Kokorite is one of the tallest, evergreen palms that can grow up to 35 m high and to approximately 60 cm in diameter. It grows at a medium rate. The tree can have up to 22 feathery leaf fronds growing from the top of the trunk which are 10 – 12 m long. Each frond consists of numerous long, pinnate leaflets arranged in a fan-like pattern. The flowers are large and showy as a clustered inflorescence. The inflorescences are cream in colour and separate by sexes. The fruit is oblong ovoid that is typically green and turns yellow or orange when ripe.

Flowering season: The flowering and fruiting season is dependent on location and local environment. The Kokorite flowers once per year. Flowers have been noted in November along with young fruits in the Rupununi (Region 9), while ripen fruits were observed in Santa Rosa (Region 1) in May.

Harvesting: The leaves are cut to access the main rib; some people climb the tree, but they may also harvest from the young palm or using the foice on a long stick. Fruits are collected when fallen on the ground.

Propagation: Seed





Use: The Kokrite has a number of uses. The leaf stalk (kokorite bone) is used to make arrows, handles and spindles for cotton spinning. The seed is used in jewellery making. The leaves are used for thatching roofs. The large hard petioles are used for food processing especially grating cassava. The stem of the leaves is used to make fish traps. Dry seeds are burnt to smoke away mosquitos. The worm found in the seed can be used as bait for fishing, and as a delicacy (2 types of worms can be found in the Kokorite, Iwo is found in the trunk and Akiwa found in the seed). The fruit is edible; some Kokorite trees bear hot tasting fruits while other bear sweet ones. The sweet Kokorite fruits mixed with cassava starch is used to make porridge.

SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

Harvest leaves when it is dark (new moon), otherwise Kokrite worms (caterpillars) will eat the leaves.

Smoke the seed to keep away evil.

Do not eat the seed, if you do, you will have no teeth.



KRAWA

Family: Bromeliaceae

Scientific name: *Bromelia* spp.

Crafters recognises three species of Krawa. There are two species that are green in colour, one with long leaves and the other shorter. The third species is purplish in colour.

Local name: Krawa, Silk Grass

Indigenous names: Ukuli (L), Karauya (M), Ziini'i (W)

Habitat: Grows in a variety of habitats including tropical forest, marginal forest and savanna areas or wherever planted.

Known distribution in Guyana: Krawa distribution verified by collections are in Region 1, 7, 8, 9.

Description: The three species of Krawa are terrestrial bromeliads similar to pineapples. They are robust, succulent plants, with leaves set out in typical rosettes of stiff, spiny leaves that grow in a spiral pattern, forming a dense cluster. The leaves are usually green and grow up to a few metres in length. Of the two green species, in one the leaves are simple and broad with drawn back thorns at the edge and growing to about 2m. The smaller species is about 1m long and the leaf edges are spiny. In the third species, the spiny leaves are green with a pale greyish mauve tint, and it grows 1 to 2m, with cylindrical and bluish-purple flowers. Community members have never witnessed any inflorescence from the green Krawa species but in the purple species, the flower emerges from the middle on a stalk and gives way to a fleshy fruit that looks like a small pineapple. This, however, is rarely seen.

Flowering season: Flowers may appear from April to July but is dependent on location, climate and local environmental conditions. They are red or orange in colour and the petals are arranged in a radial pattern.

Harvesting: Leaves from the plant can be harvested 8 months after it is planted. You have to pull and twist the leaves to harvest or the whole plant can come out.

Propagation: The plant can propagate by producing little plantlets or by splitting the main plant.



Use: The leaves of the Krawa are used for making ropes for hammocks and string for bows and other craft. The threads can also be used to trap birds; threads are fused to make a fibre trap and when the bird lands to feed, the foot becomes tangled and it cannot escape. You can make a strong fishing line with Krawa to catch himara fish (*Hoplias aimara*), and trap alligators[3]. Thread can be used to extract a loose tooth. Tibisiri from the Ité can be used if Krawa is not available.

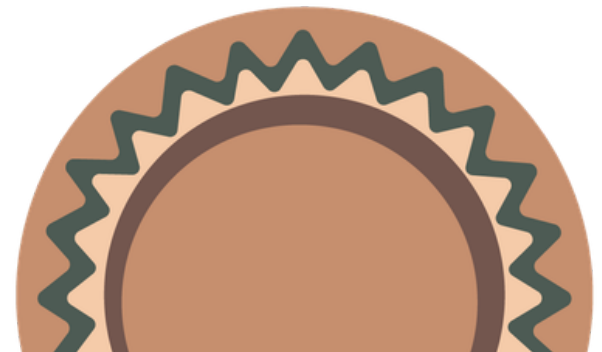


SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

Bathe with Krawa to stop seeing Kanaima[4].

If you have warts, use the juice to get rid of it.

When striped, put the fibre to dry in the sun, but then put it in the house before night or else you will get grey hair.



KURU

Family: Arecaceae

Scientific name: *Astrocaryum aculeatum*

Local name: Kuru, Kuriyu, Akuru

Indigenous names: Akhoyoro, Akuyuru, Arapipi (L), Akuyuru (M), Akorlorlo arau (Wu)

Habitat: Dry land forest but usually seen around inhabited areas. Prefers well drained sandy soils.

Known distribution in Guyana: Distribution verified by collections in Regions 1, 3, 9.

Description: Solitary, evergreen palm that grows to 15-25 m high. It has a single trunk with long black spines. The leaves are pinnate and can be 6-15 in number and 3 m long. The fruit is oval in shape and when ripe it turns from green to an orangish yellow. The flesh is a pale yellow/orange, soft, sweet pulp. The seed is large with a hard black shell similar to Awara.

Flowering season: Flowers are seen at the start of the rainy season around June, and bearings are seen in September. The inflorescent is a large cluster with cream-coloured flowers. When the fruit is ripe it falls and then people can harvest the remainder to set for ripening. Harvesting has to wait for the fruit to drop or it will be bitter. The flesh varies in colour from light to dark orange.

Harvesting: The spires are harvested from the young palm whenever available.

Propagation: Through seed which should be planted as soon as possible to maintain viability. It may take weeks to months to germinate.

Uses: The leaves are used for plaiting fans. The fruit is edible; oil can be extracted from the seed for personal care use. The seed can have a worm that is used as fish bait.



SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

If a young man wants an Amerindian girl, he has to climb the tree and slide down back to show courage.



ITÉ

Family: Arecaceae

Scientific Name: *Mauritia flexuosa*

Local Name: Ité palm

Indigenous Names: Ité (L), Kuwai ye' (M), Dyuwuza (W), Ohidu arau (female), Haukuaharu (male) (Wu)

Habitat: Ité palms are widely distributed in savanna, tropical and subtropical forest, characterised by wetlands, swamps, flood plains and riparian areas.

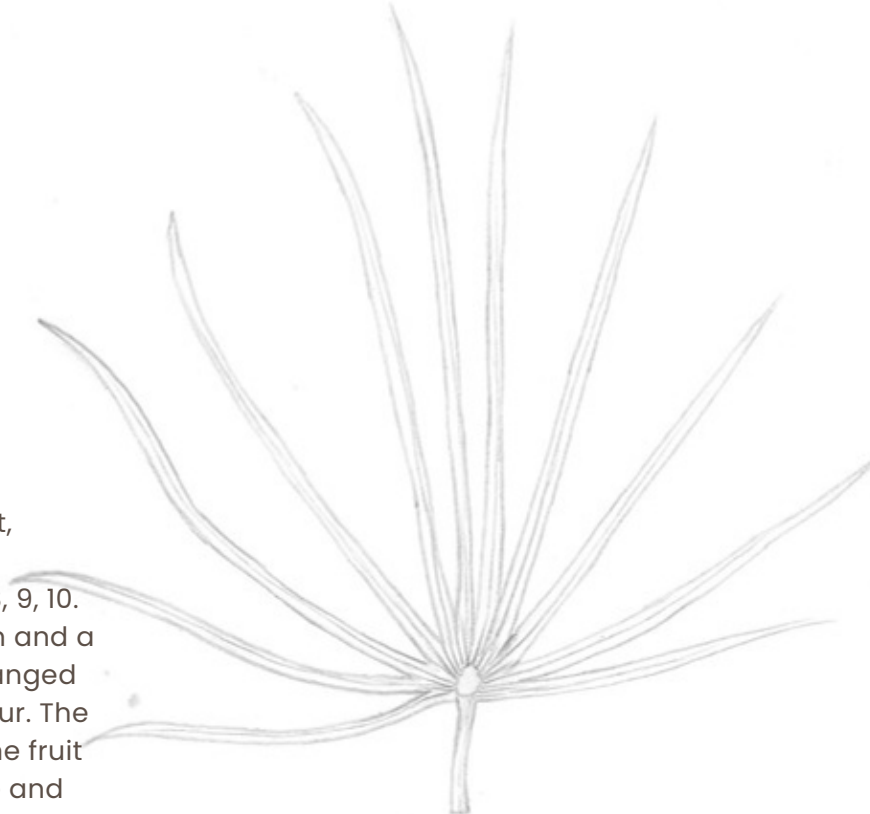
Known distribution in Guyana: Verified by observations in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Description: Tall, slender tree with a single smooth trunk, a diameter of up to 60 cm and a maximum height of 25-35 m. The large compound leaves are fan-shaped and arranged in a dense spherical cluster at the top of the trunk. The flowers are yellowish in colour. The fruit, which appears in December to June, is chestnut coloured with shiny scales. The fruit goes through a series of colour changes before fully ripe. The flesh is yellow orange and covers a hard oval nut. The tree takes about 10 years to reach maturity. If it does not bear fruit after a number of years it can be cut to harvest tucuma[5] worms. The palms grow in groves or singly. The male and female sexual parts are on separate trees.

Flowering season: Flowers appear from December to April. First flowering depends on if and how often the leaves of the tree are harvested. If allowed to grow, the first flower will come in at 3m. The tree flower is yellow and appears in December. The tree flowers with individual genders. The tree can be seen fruiting in March. The fruit is ready for harvesting after it moves through the following colour changes; yellow - brown - red brown - deep red - wax film.

Harvesting: The spires are harvested from the tree mainly by climbing, though some may cut the tree down. The activity could be considered dangerous because of snakes, bees and wasps that can be found in the tree. The tree will grow a spire about every 6 weeks. The fruit needs to start dropping before they can be harvested.

Propagation: The seed is dispersed by water.



Uses: All the parts of the tree are used: the fruit is edible and can be used to make oil and a local drink; the oil is used in the making of soap; the fruit pulp can be dried to make flour; the leaves are used for roof thatching; the tibusiri straw is stripped from the leaves spire and is used to make rope, hammock, baskets and other craft items. The trunk can also be used for construction. The old trunk is left to breed tucuma for about 6 weeks. The rib from the leaf stalk is used to stitch palm leaf for roofing. The tallest or a mature ité palm with white spots on the trunk can produce natural sweet water for tea or porridge, which helps to balance your diet, e.g. for those with high sugar levels.



SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

Harvest leaves in the dark (new moon). If harvested in moonlight, beetles will eat the leaves, or the leaves will rot faster.

Pick and dry fruits for five days and soak them for three days. They can be scraped to use as the skin starts to raise.

The small tucuma is believed to be good for asthma, whereas the large worms are eaten.



MANNI

Family: Guttiferae

Scientific name: *Symphonia globulifera*

Local name: Manni Tree

Indigenous names: Mani (L), Maitakinpî ye' (M), Ohoru (Wr)

Habitat: Grows mainly in wet tropical forests in rain and riverine forest along slopes of non-flooded lowland forest at elevations below 500 m.

Known distribution in Guyana: Distribution verified by collections in Regions 1, 3, 8, 9.

Description: Tall tree of up to 40 m height with a sparse crown. The tree can be unbranched for most of its height and can grow up to 80 cm in diameter. The base of the trunk has root spurs and stilt roots to about 1 m high. The outer bark is dark brown to yellow brown. The tree has glossy, dark green leaves arranged in a whorl around the branch. The tree produces small, white flowers with five petals, which are followed by spherical fruits that resemble small melons. These fruits are green when young, turning yellow orange as they ripen. The flesh of the fruit is edible and has a sweet, tangy flavour.

Flowering season: The flowering and fruiting seasons may vary from location to location. However, the main flowering time is within the rainy season from May to July. The fruits may appear in November to December and may extend into January to February.

Harvesting: The Manni tree produces a yellowish latex that is used in the production of Karamanni. It is suggested that the latex should be allowed to dry on the tree and drop first before use. The dried pieces can be picked up off the ground around the base of the tree. The dry latex can survive for years on the ground. However, it may have a lot of impurities and would require some refinement when creating Karamanni.

Propagation: Seed





Uses: The resin is used to make a local glue/sealant called Karamanni which is used for fastening points and feathers to arrows, for waxing thread, caulking canoes and fastening the teeth on the traditional grater. The bark of the Manni tree is also used as medicine, and the resin and high-quality wood in heavy construction.

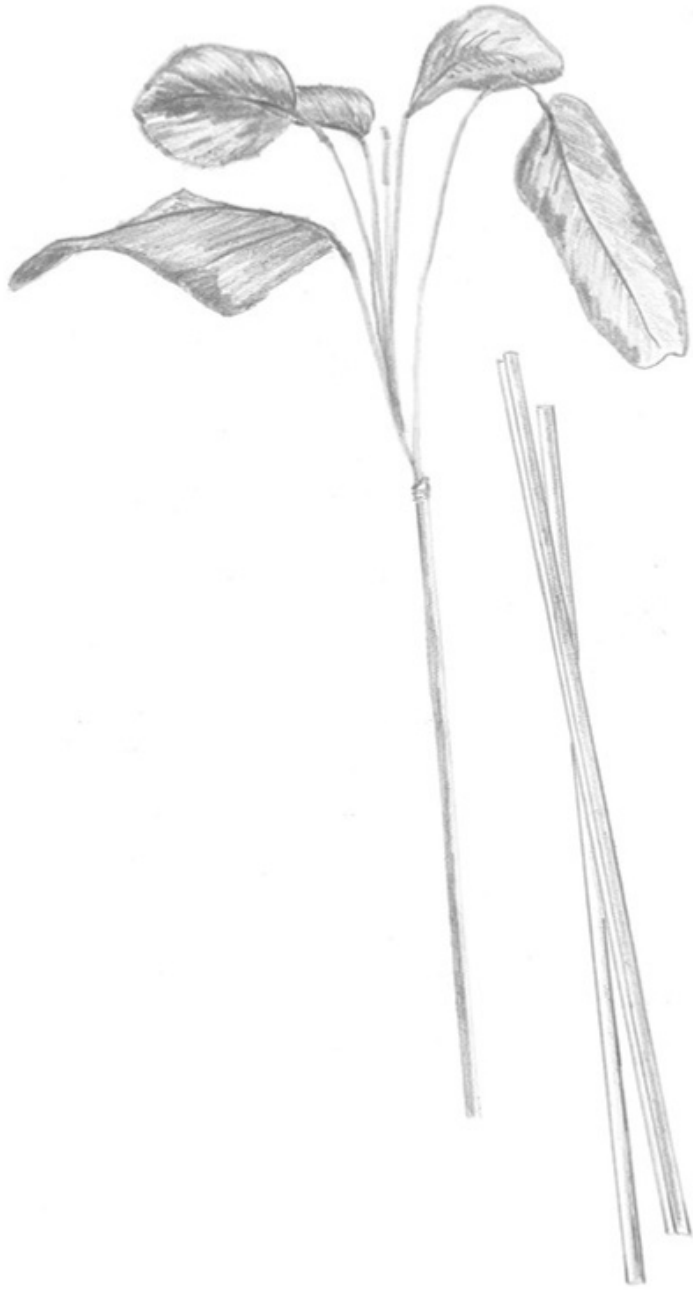


SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

The resin is used to smoke sick persons, chase evil spirits and sick babies.



MUKURU



Family: Marantaceae

Scientific name: *Ischnosiphon* spp.

There are four species of Mukuru that have been scientifically identified in Guyana. There are at least three species of Mukuru that are being utilised by the communities in their craft work and they are identified based on their habitat. These are the hill mukuru, swamp mukuru and jointed mukuru.

Known distribution in Guyana (for all species):

Distribution verified by plant collections in Regions 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Harvesting (for all species): The plant must have more than 8 leaves to harvest and less than 12. If harvested too young or too old, the straw (strips) will be too brittle to use. The harvesting cycles is every 6–9 months.

Propagation (for all species): Seed, rhizome and shoot (leaf base)



Local name: Hill Mukuru

Indigenous names: Mana (M), Mokoro (W), Sefurru (Wu)

Habitat: Found in the highlands and level ground under dense primary forest but not in swampy areas.

Description: Plant grows to at least 10 m above ground, major stems are segmented into long cane-like internodes separated by closely set bladeless sheaths. The leaves are elliptic blades. The flowers are on short, clustered branches arising from the major stems. They are white in colour.

Flowering season: Rainy season from May to June.



Local name: Swamp Mukuru

Indigenous names: Tiriti (L), Moroka (M), Aishawaro (W)

Habitat: Common in dense primary forest on the lower part of ridge slopes and on level but not swampy ground.

Description: Herbaceous perennial, rambling plant, forming a clump of growth 1.5 to 4.5 m tall from an underground rhizome. The leaves gather in fan-like clusters at the top of a leafless, cane-like stem. The leaves are narrowly elliptic and dull greyish green on the underside. The flowers are at the end of the stem singly or in cluster and purplish in colour.

Flowering season: Flowers have been witnessed in May in Region 3 and September in Region 9.





Local name: Jointed Mukuru

Indigenous names: Warakabakoro (L) Kasiriye' (M),
Namachi kodoro (W)

Habitat: This understorey plant is found in mixed forest at the foot of mountains in rocky areas.

Description: Shrubby, perennial, herbaceous plant growing in clumps up to 4m tall from an underground rhizome. The major stems are jointed; every joint is about 1 m long. Leaves are spear shaped. The solitary flowers are on short, clustered branches arising from sheaths on the major stems.

Flowering season: Rainy season from May to June.

Uses of all species: The different species of Mukuru are used for making traditional basketry. The Jointed Mukuru is mainly used for sifters, warishis and arrows as the straws that are only 1m long. The Hill Mukuru is believed to be the best species for making straws as it is stronger, and the Swamp Mukuru is mostly used because of ease of access and abundance. Both are used to commonly make sifters, shumbas and matapees.





SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

Before harvesting, the crafter should blow tobacco smoke and speak to the plant. The mukuru plants have an owner (spirit guardian).

Always eat pepper (burn your mouth) before going into the forest to harvest mukuru.

Do not sell the first craft you make otherwise you will not be able to plait any more, because you have to keep the luck with you.

NIBBI

Family: Araceae

Scientific name: *Heteropsis flexuosa*

Local name: Nibbi

Indigenous names: Sarebanaro, Mibi (L), Muna (M), Tibi (W)

Habitat: Can be found in the canopy of lowland tropical rainforest and swamp forests.

Known distribution in Guyana: Distribution has been verified by collections in Regions 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

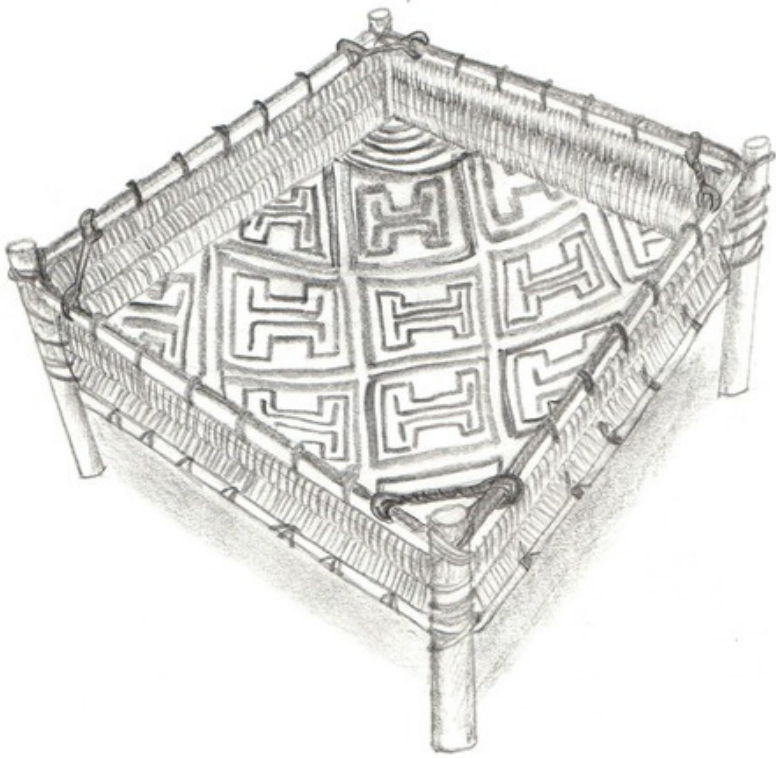
Description: The Nibbi is a hemi-epiphytic[2] plant that can grow up to 23 m (the wrapping roots maybe longer) and has absorbing and anchoring roots that descend to the ground. The aerial roots grow and anchor the plant to its host by wrapping itself around the trunk of the host tree. The young growing roots are soft and dark brown in colour. The mature roots are tough, flexible, dense and brownish grey in colour, having the appearance of polished wood. The leaves are simple, alternate and have a leather like appearance and feel. The plant produces a yellowish white flower. The Nibbi produces yellow or orange berries containing one to five black seeds. The plant appears to produce flower and fruit throughout the year.

Flowering season: Fruiting and flowering occurs throughout the months of both the wet and dry seasons. Mature fruits can be found at the height of the dry seasons from March to May, and in November.

Harvesting: The mature root is dark brown, whereas the immature root has green bark. If the root is not in the ground, it is still growing and not ready for harvesting. To harvest, you need to cut the root at the bottom, pull the vine clear of the tree trunk and then pull down. The free hanging roots are preferred for weaving. New roots may take about 5 years to grow back.

Propagation: By seed, which is distributed by birds.





Uses: Nibbi is used for making different types of baskets, warishis and for framing some traditional craft such as the shumba. It is also used in the making of furniture including chairs and tables. If tied together in short sections, it can make a broom. It is also used for stitching the Troolie palm leaves (*Manicaria saccifera*) when roofing the huse.

SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

Do not cut the Nibbi before bursting (pulling it away) from the mother tree.

You can invoke the help of Kare (Squirrel) to help cut the Nibbi.

If a young girl fetches a warishi made with nibbi often, she will not grow old fast.



WATER GOURD



Family: Cucurbitaceae

Scientific name: *Lagenaria* spp.

Local name: Bottle Gourd

Indigenous names: Horoto (L), Kusan Pottoro Wayi (M), Moto(W)

Habitat: Mainly a cultivate species of the squash family, found in disturbed areas and along the shores of rivers and lakes.

Known distribution in Guyana: Wherever cultivated but verified records known for Regions 1 and 8.

Description: Fast growing running vine with hairy stems and fork tendrils. The stems can get to more than 10m high. There are many varieties. The leaves are simple and may be lobed or unlobed and not divided into leaflets. The edges of the leaf are serrated. They are arranged alternately on the vine. The flowers are large, funnel-shaped and may be yellow or white in colour and open at nights. The fruit is fleshy but does not split open when dried.

Flowering season: The vine flowers continuously.

Harvesting: The gourds are left on the vine to dry before collection.

Propagation: Seed

Uses: The old fruit can be dried and used as storage containers for water, seeds and other items. The smaller gourds can be used as spoons, cups and bowls. They are also used as musical instruments. Young fruit of some species are used as a vegetable. The leaves and flowers are also edible.



SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

When you cook the squash, rain will fall.



WATER MORA

Family: Cyclanthaceae

Scientific name: *Thoracocarpus bissectus*

Local names: Water Mora, Scraping Nibi

Indigenous names: Mamuri (L), Mamuzi (W) Ini (Wu)

Habitat: The Water Mora is found in the canopy of lowland tropical forest especially along riverbanks and swamps.

Known distribution in Guyana: Distribution is verified by collections in Regions 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9.

Description: The Water Mora is an evergreen climbing plant growing 10–15 m. It has a woody stem that branches and has evenly spaced circular scars. The aerial roots are either short and climbing or long and rope like. It is reddish brown and can hang free from the branches and upper parts of the stems. The leaves are in a spiral pattern at the end of the branches. They are whole when young but split when older. The flower is in a cluster that is at the end of the stem; it is thick and hangs down in a cylinder shape. The flowers are white to cream coloured. Both male and female flowers are on the same plant. When the flower becomes a fruit, the cluster is longer, shiny and changes colour from green to brown. It feels rough due to the left-over petals. There are many small seeds inside.

Flowering season: The plant flowers and fruits throughout the year.

Harvesting: Only the straight roots are harvested. Other roots are wrapped around the tree anchoring the plant. The straight root is separated and pulled to get as long a length as possible.

Propagation: Seeds which are distributed by bats, birds and monkeys.





Use: The roots are used for binding and plaiting craft. It is believed to be stronger than Nibbi but less easy to work with. The outside has to be scrapped before it can be stripped to create straws for plaiting quakes, warishis and baskets. The harder core is used to make brooms.



SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

If water mora is tied and placed under a jar holding paiwari, it will make it stronger.

If tied in a circle and thrown into the water, it will keep away water spirits such as mermen.

If tied around the trunk of a tree shedding its young fruit, the fruit will stop dropping until fully ripe.

YARI YARI



Family: Annonaceae

Scientific name: *Duguetia* spp.

There are three species that community members indicate they use for craft. These are the White, Black and Brown Yari Yari.

Distribution (of all species): Distribution verified by collections in Regions 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Harvesting (for all species): The rods can be harvested at any time. Usually, the young stems are used. The desired length is cut when needed and prepared before use.

Propagation (for all species): Cuttings of young root and shoots and seeds. They grow about 3 m apart.

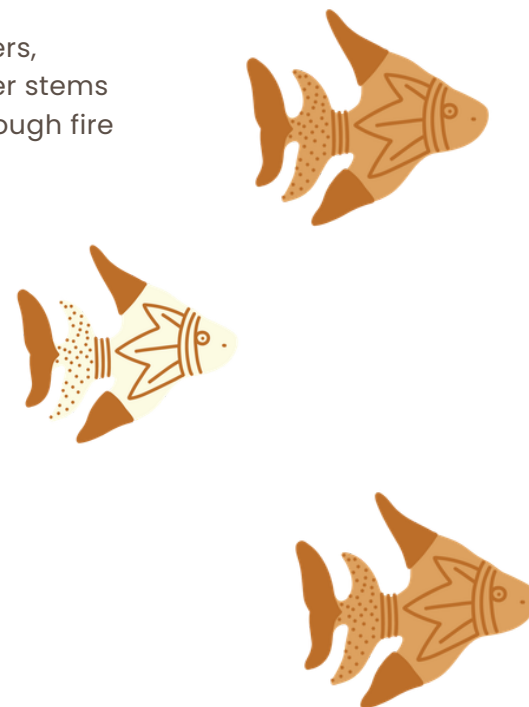
Use (for all species): The cut stems are used for framing sifters, warishis and shumbas, and for making fishing rods. The larger stems are for housing materials. The cut rods should be passed through fire to peel the bark before drying in the sun.

SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

Heat to clean off the bark of Black Yari Yari, and to make it have a stronger spring that would not break off easily when catching bigger fish.

Talk to the yari yari plant before cutting, request help to catch the fishes.

Always talk to the fishing rod before going to catch fish.



Local name: Black Yari Yari

Indigenous Names: Yara Yara (L), Kunaipuye' (M), Podidi'o kobawii (W), Zara Zara (Wu)

Habitat: Tropical lowland forest in flat swampy areas.

Description: The Black Yari Yari is a tall, slender tree of about 20 cm diameter and 15 m height. The leaves are broad and alternately arranged on the stem.

Flowering Season: The flowers are seen going into the rainy season from May to June.



Local name: Brown Yari Yari

Indigenous name: Wuzada zaa'o kobawii (W)

Habitat: Tropical lowland forest, banks of rivers.

Description: Grows to 15 m in height. The fruit is green in colour and is oval shaped with a pointed end.

Flowering season: The flower is white in colour and is seen going into the rainy season from April to September.

Local name: White Yari Yari (*Duguetia pycnastera*)

Indigenous names: Yara Yara (L), Araira ye' (M), Hoiju (Wu)

Habitat: Found in swamp forest along small streams. Abundant in the understorey of Mora Forest. Found occasionally in mixed forest.

Description: The White Yari Yari is a tall tree reaching 15 m with a narrow trunk about 12 cm. The outer bark is brown. The branches are noticeably grooved. The young leaves are covered with pale yellow hairs. The leaves are arranged alternately along the branches. They are simple in shape and positioned in 2 rows. They are dark green on the upper surface and pale below. The inflorescences occur between the leaves and bear one to two flowers. They are yellow in colour and ovoid in shape. The fruit is pale green when immature, peach coloured when ripe. The seeds are reddish brown and spherical.



SWIVEL STICK



Family: Myristicaceae

Scientific name: *Virola* spp.

Local name: Swivel Stick, Hill Dalli

Indigenous names: Dalli (L), Anoi' ye' (M)

Distribution: Distribution verified by collections in Regions 2, 3, 8, 9, 10 and by observations in Region 1.

Habitat: Grows in dense primary and secondary forest on well-drained soil up to elevations of 125 m. It prefers humid and shaded environments.

Description: Medium size tree with a flat or spreading crown and a maximum height of 30 m. The bark maybe smooth and brown and grey in colour. The leaves are dark green on the upper side and lighter underneath. They are simple, long and glossy with a leathery texture and clear veins. The leaf stocks are arranged in a distinctive circular pattern on the stem, hence the name Swivel Stick. The flowers are small, yellow and single sexed arranged in a cluster. The fruit is reddish in colour and oval shaped. They may come in clusters.

Flowering Season: The flowering season usually varies per location but typically occurs during the rainy season from April to June. The fruiting occurs throughout the year but peaks in the rainy season.

Harvesting: The rods can be harvested at any time. Usually, the young stems are used. The desired length is cut when needed and prepared before use.

Propagation: Seed

Use: Crafters use the young stem as an alternative for framing sifters and warishis. Species of this genus is used in the timber industry. It is believed the seed is rich in oil and can be used in the making of soap.



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Notes

[1] <https://powo.science.kew.org/>; <https://tropical.theferns.info/query.php>; <https://www.eol.org/>; <https://palmpedia.net/wiki/index.html>; <https://pfaf.org/user/>; van Andel, T.R. (2000). Non-timber forest products of the North-West district of Guyana (part 11 field guide). Tropenbos-Guyana Series 8B, University of Utrecht, The Netherlands.

[2] Hemi-epiphytes have seeds that germinate in the canopy of the forest where they live as a epiphyte before sending roots downward which eventually root in the soil.

[3] Alligators are local reference to the caiman, mainly the Spectacled Caiman.

[4] Kanaima are believed to be spirits or shape shifters that act in revenge for some form of perceived slight.

[5] The tucuma is the larvae of a moth found growing in palm trees.



