



Ethnobotanical Leaflets



An Ethnobotanical Walk with Luis Diego Gómez

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Luis Diego Gómez, director of the Wilson Botanical Garden and Las Cruces Biological Station in Coto Brús, Costa Rica, is renowned as a taxonomist and ethnobotanist. Las Cruces is one of several biological stations serving the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS). Summer 2000, the first OTS class in ethnobiology, BIO 136L, was conducted by him in Costa Rica, from July 15 to August 15. The class serves undergraduates and if funding can be secured, plans are to teach it in alternate years. Shortly after BIO 136L ended, OTS awarded its first student grant for ethnobotanical study within Costa Rica.

In late June, 2000, prior to the start of the ethnobiology class, Luis Diego Gómez led an orientation walk in the Wilson Botanical Garden, for students in the graduate course OTS-9, a class in tropical systematic botany. Knowing that several people in the course had interests in economic and ethnobotany, he kindly included information on the use of several of the plants included on the tour. The following plant list is from that walk. All the plants listed here are tropical, though not all are native Costa Rican species. As Director, Luis Diego Gómez hopes to remove all hybrids from the Garden and increase the number of Costa Rican endemic plants in keeping with his dedication to native plant preservation. Spelling of plant names on the list follows that of the INBIO Herbarium Database in San José, Costa Rica.

[Economic Botany Plant Chart from Wilson Botanical Garden, Costa Rica](#)

For a description of Plantains, Iguanas and Shamans, the OTS field ethnobiology course, go to <http://www.ots.duke.edu/~abarbee/academic/ethno.htm>. For more information on OTS Educational programs check <http://www.ots.duke.edu/~abarbee/academic/>.

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family (order)	genus	species	author	part used	Preparation/use
Arecaceae (Arecales)	Oenocarpus Oenocarpus	mapora spp.		Fruits Seeds	Fruits make a Vitamin C rich drink, pressing the seeds yields a fine oil, similar in quality and uses to olive oil
Asteraceae (Asterales)	Emilia	sonchifolia	(L.) DC.	Whole plant	Tea as a diuretic
Bixaceae (Violales)	Bixa	orellana	L.	Seeds, oil from pods Aril	Mature seeds are the source of the spice Achiote (annatto) and are also used as a cosmetic, immature seeds as abortifacient, red oil smeared on burns to promote healing and on dermal tissue as anti-fungal, powdery aril of seeds in pods is rich in bixin and other carotenoids.
Clusiaceae (Theales)	Clusia	spp.		Latex	Dermal topical as anti-fungal for mycosis and anti-viral for herpes simplex, loses these properties once congealed
Euphorbiaceae (Euphorbiales)	Euphorbia	lancifolia	Schltl.	Fresh leaves	Infusion used as a galactagogue

Juglandiaceae (Juglandales)	Juglans	neotropica	Manning	Leaf	Steep in water, glycerine or alcohol, extract for control of hypoglycemia, lowers blood sugar, as a shampoo alleged to stop graying and splitting
Rubiaceae (Rubiales)	Cinchona Cinchona	pubescens spp.	Vahl.	Unspecified	Source of quinine
Solanaceae (Solanales)	Brunfelsia Brunfelsia	grandifolia spp.	Benth.	Unspecified	Several species of this genus have been added into ayuahasca in Amazonia, also used there as a vermifuge and topically in a paste as an analgesic, contains many tropane alkaloids
Sapotaceae (Ebenales)	Manikara	chicle	(Pittier) Gilly	Latex	Latex chewed as gum when it congeals to a sticky form