



# MAYA NUT

(*Brosimum alicastrum*)



Global  
Facilitation  
Unit  
for Underutilized  
Species

enabling deployment of underutilized species



**What is Maya nut** and where does it come from?

**Maya nut is the seed of *Brosimum alicastrum*, a large tropical rainforest tree that belongs to the fig family. It is native to Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean. It is also called Ramon nut, Breadnut, Ojoche, Ox, Ash, Ujuxte, Ojite, Ojushte, Ujushte, Capomo, Pisba waihka and Masica. It was once abundant throughout Central America but is now highly threatened and even extinct in parts of its range due to cutting for firewood and corn planting. The tree can reach up to 45 meters in height.**

## PROPERTIES

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Maya nut is a wild-harvested forest product which grows in naturally fertile rainforest soils and is naturally organic because no chemicals, fertilizers or pesticides are needed. It is extremely high in fiber, calcium, potassium, folate, iron, zinc, protein and vitamins A, B, C and E. Maya nut is nutritionally comparable to amaranth, quinoa and soy, and was a staple food for the pre-Columbian Maya and other indigenous groups in Mesoamerica.

*The Equilibrium Fund is an international NGO working to rescue lost indigenous knowledge about the maya nut in Central America and Mexico to help conserve rainforest, reduce poverty and improve food security. For this work The Equilibrium Fund won the St Andrews Prize for the Environment in 2006 and the Equator Prize in 2007. Since 2001 The Equilibrium Fund has trained over 7000 women from 348 villages in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico. 5 women's maya nut producer groups comprised of over 400 member-owners now earn income and enjoy better health and nutrition by producing and selling maya nut. Over 400,000 new maya nut seedlings have been planted and hundreds of hectares of rainforest has been conserved as a direct result of The Equilibrium Fund's work.*





## ❖ Food Preparation

The fresh seed can be boiled and ground into a dough similar to corn masa which can be used for soups, tamales, tortillas, burgers, puree and other dishes. The dry seed can be roasted and ground into a flour for use in drinks and baked goods. Stewed the nut tastes like mashed potato, roasted it tastes like chocolate or coffee and can be prepared in numerous other dishes. In Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua maya nut is being produced and marketed by autonomous women's producer groups.

## ❖ Other Uses

Maya nut leaves are excellent fodder for cows and goats, providing a sustainable alternative to pasture in the tropics. Maya nut is a keystone species in neotropical lowland ecosystems, as it is the preferred food source for over 85% of neotropical birds and wildlife. Healthy maya nut forests are ideal for subsistence hunting and ecotourism as well as providing a refuge for tropical biodiversity.

## GROWING

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One maya nut tree can produce up to 180 kgs of food per year. A recent discovery is a Mexican maya nut varietal from Merida which produces fruit in its 4th year. This is a vast improvement over unimproved varieties which tend to produce in their 8th year. Maya nut tolerates marginal soils and drought, making it an excellent species for reforestation in degraded sites. Once established it requires no maintenance or inputs and a maya nut tree will produce food and provide ecosystem services for over 150 years.

## HARVESTING

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Fresh maya nut seed is harvested from the forest floor. It is bright green and the size of a macadamia nut (2-3 cm in diameter).

# MAYA NUT

## **The economic and environmental potential of maya nut**

Maya nut seed has the potential to become one of the most economically important nontimber forest products in the world. This is due to several factors including high economic value and consumer demand, abundance, productivity, distribution, ease of harvest and processing, good nutritional and culinary qualities, provision of marketable ecosystem services including carbon sequestration, and protection of soil, watersheds and biodiversity. If managed correctly, consumer demand for maya nut has the potential to slow and eventually reverse deforestation, loss of biodiversity, poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition created by conventional cropping systems in Central America and Mexico. Unfortunately maya nut has received little attention from agronomists and foresters and there is little information about sustainable harvest levels, genetics and population biology of the species. This jeopardizes the potential of wild-harvested maya nut to provide sustainable livelihoods for rural forest dwelling communities.

## **Achieving social and ecological sustainability**

The impact of “The Equilibrium Fund’s” maya nut Program so far has been improved food security and improved family nutrition for rural peoples, community-based conservation of the species, reforestation, improvement in women’s self-esteem, status and leadership, more income for women, and the stimulation of rural economies by adding value to a formerly worthless forest product.



**The exhibits on show** are just few of many commercial products made from the Maya nut:

Maya nut coffee

Maya nut chai

Maya nut flour

Herbal stimulant laxative with maya nut

#### SOME PRODUCERS / RETAILERS / DISTRIBUTORS

❖ The Equilibrium Fund - [www.theequilibriumfund.com](http://www.theequilibriumfund.com)

❖ Alimentos Nutri-Naturales - [alimentosnutrinaturales@yahoo.com](mailto:alimentosnutrinaturales@yahoo.com)

❖ Teeccino Caffé Inc - [www.teeccino.com](http://www.teeccino.com)

❖ Traditional Medicinals - [www.TraditionalMedicinals.com](http://www.TraditionalMedicinals.com)

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