

PALM BRIEF

Coquito Nuts (*Jubaea chilensis*)

A trip to the produce section of a well-stocked grocery store can be an object lesson in ethnobotany. For this reason, I am always on the look out for new and interesting products. A recent trip to my local grocery store in Claremont brought a pleasant surprise: coquito nuts, the seeds of *Jubaea chilensis* (Molina) Baillon, are now being marketed here in southern California. *Jubaea chilensis*, the Chilean Wine Palm, is sometimes cultivated locally as an ornamental, but never before have I seen coquito nuts, imported from Chile, offered for sale. My curiosity and scientific interest cost me \$3.99 for a six-ounce package.

Coquito nuts are small and round, the approximate size and shape of a large macadamia nut (about 2 cm in diam.). They in fact resemble coconuts on a Lil-

liputian scale (Fig. 1). The seed coat is thin and brown and eaten with the nut; a raphe 0.5-1 cm long is present. The "meat" (endosperm) is translucent white and 3-4 mm thick, and the seed cavity is empty (not water filled as in coconut). The nuts have the flavor and aroma of coconut. An informal and unscientific survey of my colleagues around the lunch table revealed that most found the nuts to be of excellent flavor albeit less sweet than coconut. Coquito nuts are drier and crunchier than coconut.

The nuts are distributed by Frieda's Finest Produce Specialities, Inc. (Los Angeles, CA), which supplied the following information about its product: Coquito nuts are harvested and shelled by hand from trees cultivated in central coastal Chile. The trees average 2 m in height and produce nuts from April through September. No pesti-



1. Seeds of *Jubaea chilensis* marketed in California as "coquito nuts."

cides are used on the trees. The nuts have a shelf life of two weeks, longer if refrigerated with high humidity. A 28.3 g (one oz.) serving contains the following: 180 Calories, 2.34 g protein, 5.01 g carbohydrates, 17 g fat, and 3.4 g fiber.

It is encouraging to see *Jubaea* being exploited in a nondestructive manner. Destructive exploitation, for wine and "honey" (syrup), has severely reduced the numbers of this magnificent palm in the wild. Chilean botanists already consider

Jubaea to be endangered. Will its spectacular size and impressive beauty alone be enough to save *Jubaea* from extinction? Perhaps not, but maybe its economic potential as an export crop will tilt the balance in favor of *Jubaea chilensis*.

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Principes, 35(2), 1991, pp. 108-109

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Bonsai *Chrysalidocarpus lutescens* and *Cocos nucifera*

Centuries ago the Japanese developed the bonsai method of cultivating trees in small containers, by means of root and branch pruning, to produce miniature long-lived plants of great beauty. The bonsai technique apparently was more recently applied to *Rhapis* palms, giving us strikingly attractive small ornamental plants. The two major sources of information on growing these small rhapsis (Okita and Hollenberg 1981, McKamey 1983) occasionally refer to them as bonsai, although the most common designations employed are "miniature" or "dwarf." Searching through the palm literature, I was able to find reference to other bonsai palms only in a note by Satake (1980).

In April 1988 I was at the Bogor Botanic Garden in Indonesia, to meet with Johanis Mogeia concerning the World Wildlife Fund project on palm conservation and utilization. As part of local field visits, Johanis took me to a nearby plant nursery. Perched on a hillside above Bogor, Robbyanto Jayanata has created a plant lover's paradise of local and exotic species, with palms being very well represented. The palm collection

was impressive, but Robby's personal bonsai *Chrysalidocarpus lutescens* and *Cocos nucifera* palms, were captivating. I photographed the palms (Figs. 1,2) and Johanis later sent me the following details he obtained from Robby about how these remarkable bonsai were grown.



1. Twenty-five-year old bonsai *Chrysalidocarpus lutescens* measuring 35 cm (13.8 in) in height.