PLANT FACT SHEET

Raphia farinifera (Gaertn.) Hylander

GENUS *Raphia* **FAMILY** Arecaceae

COMMON NAMES Raffia palm, Madagascar raffia palm

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Nuts, Leaves, Sago, Palm heart, Cabbage, Fruit, Sap, Vegetable, Fruit - oil

The flower stalk can be tapped for sap for wine.
The cabbage can be eaten.
Flour is made from the pith of the stem.
The fruit pulp yields a fatty oil used for edible purposes after refining. The fruit are crushed in a mortar, water added and then boiled and left to cool. The oil floats to the top and is skimmed off and used for cooking.

DESCRIPTION

A palm with a single trunk. The trunk is usually very short. The fronds grow to 8-10 m high. There are new suckers produced at the base. The leaves are 15-18 m long. They hang over. They are feather-like and 18 m long. The male and female flowers are separate on a large branched plume like structure. This can be 3 m long and take 2-3 years to develop. The flower head starts erect and later bends over and hangs below the leaves. The fruit are oblong and 9 cm long. They have overlapping scales. They are shiny and brown and have one seed inside.

HABITAT

It is a tropical plant. It grows in the lowlands. It grows in swamp areas. It grows from sea level to 880 m altitude. In Tanzania it grows from sea level to 2,500 m above sea level. It suits moist and humid locations. It suits plant hardiness zones 10-11. In Townsville palmetum.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

It spreads by suckers. Seeds are slow to germinate. The thick outer layer of the seeds needs to be removed.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Trees live for 25-35 years, set flowers, then wither and die.

NOTES

There are about 28-30 Raphia species. Most are in Africa and one is in central America. Raffia fibre is made from the leaf bases.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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