PLANT FACT SHEET

Bactris gasipaes Kunth.

GENUS *Bactris* **FAMILY** Arecaceae

COMMON NAMES Peach palm

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, Flower shoots, Cabbage, Palm heart, Vegetable, Seed

The fruit are used cooked or in preserves. The fruit is also dried and ground into flour.
The flesh of the fruit is eaten raw.
The fruit is boiled in salt water for 3 hours, the seeds removed then eaten.
The kernel of the seeds is also edible.
The palm cabbage is edible.

DESCRIPTION

A tall slender palm with thorny trunk and suckers at the base. It often has between 1 and 13 stems. The stems are straight and un-branched. They are 6-24 m tall, 12-26 cm in diameter, with nodes 2-9 cm long and internodes 7-27 cm long at breast height. The canopy has 10-30 pinnate leaves which are spineless. The petiole-sheath is 49-179 cm long, the rachis is 179-396 cm long, and has 180-386 leaflets. The leaflets are twice forked and leaflets are 58-115 cm long, 3-6 cm wide. Flowers are separately male and female on the same stalk of the same palm. Female flowers are irregularly arranged among male flowers. Fruit are orange when ripe. and about 5-8 cm across. They have yellow oily flesh. Fruit without seeds often occur.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It suits the hot, wet tropical lowlands. These palms have good wind resistance. They have a moderate tolerance of drought. They grow from sea level to 1200 m altitude in regions near the equator. It suits the wet tropics. It is grown from approximately 17°N to 16°S of the equator. It is most productive on deep well drained soils in the tropics below 800 m altitude and with a well distributed rainfall of 2000-5000 mm per year and a temperature above 24°C. It will grow on poor acid soils with low rainfall. It suits hardiness zones 11-12.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants can be grown from seeds or suckers. Normally only 4 suckers per plant are kept and others removed. Before taking the suckers it is best to partly cut them off and allow roots to develop more strongly. A spacing of 5-6 m apart is suitable. Mycorrhizae attached to the roots give fast growth rates. Under subsistence conditions palms are often widely spaced but for intensive agriculture it is planted at 400-500 plants/ha for fruit and 3000

to 20 000 plants for heart-of-palm. Plants are pollinated by insects but can be pollinated by wind. Small beetles are attracted to the flower and pollinate the plant in Central America. If using seeds, fresh seed should be planted. They germinate in 3-5 months.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Seeds normally germinate in 30-90 days under normal conditions. Palms grow rapidly under the best conditions. Palms commence bearing after 5-8 years and may produce for 70-80 years. Fruit is produced in large clusters of 50-100 fruit. Four or five clusters are produced per year. Fruiting is seasonal. Fruit takes 6 months to mature and keeps well on the tree. The number of mature fruits per inflorescence (commonly referred to as raceme or bunch) varies from 0 to 764, with total fruit weight 0-20 kg.
The palms can be harvested for palm hearts 2.5-4 years after planting. Each palm yields 1.3 kg of edible heart.

NOTES

There are 239 Bactris species. There are 75 species in tropical America. Most Bactris have fruit that are edible but many are not attractive. The fruit are high in Vitamin A. The red variety has 2.76 mg of carotene while the yellow variety has 0.835 mg.

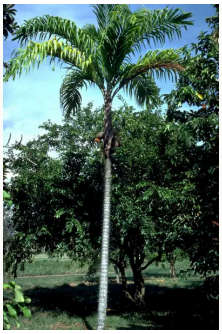
PICTURES



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