PLANT FACT SHEET

Metroxylon salomonense (Warburg) Becc.

GENUS *Metroxylon* **FAMILY** Arecaceae

COMMON NAMES Solomon's sago

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Pith starch, Palm heart

The starch is extracted from the trunk and eaten cooked.
The palm cabbage is edible.

DESCRIPTION

A sago palm. It is a solitary palm with no suckers at the base. It can grow 17 m high. The trunk can be 1.3 m across. The crown is graceful with arching fronds. There can be spines on older palms. The leaves are long with wide leaflets along the stalk. They are dark green. The flower is produce at the top of the palm. The flower is very large and takes 15-20 months for the flower to fully develop and produce seeds. The flower arrangement has branches which are spreading and drooping. The seeds are large (10 cm across). They are scaly and straw coloured. After another 2 years the palm gradually dies.

HABITAT

It is a tropical plant. It grows in North Solomons Province of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. It grows in less swampy sites than sago. It needs fertile soils. It can grow up to 880 m altitude. It suits hardiness zones 11-12.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are grown from seeds.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Time to maturity is 12-15 years. The palm is felled, the outer hull stripped off then the pith pounded and the starch extracted by washing in water and letting the starch settle out. Four men can cut, process and collect the starch from one palm in 4-5 hours. When a team do this work it is allocated amongst cutters, shredders, washers and packers.

Planting instructions

Solomon's sago

Scientific name:Metroxylon salomonense

How is this sago different?

The sago palm that occurs in the North Solomons province and in the Solomon Islands is quite different from the sago that grows in other areas of Papua New Guinea. It has a different scientific name. The sicientific name is Metroxylon salomonense. Originally, the sago in North Solomons Province was called Metroxylon bougainvillense but now that name has been shown to be not correct as the plant is the same as the one in the Solomon Islands.

How is it different? The leaves or fronds of this sago palm are much larger than those of the other Papua New Guinea sago palm. As well the seeds are much larger and this sago does not produce suckers. The stem of the Solomon's sago is also larger and the flower at the top of the palm is very large.

Growing Solomon island sago.

This sago is grown from seeds and it does not produce suckers. The seeds are large - up to 6 cm or more across. This sago normally grows in drier sites than for the normal sago in Ppua New Guinea. The seeds are often planted on a bank or along a ridge away from a creek or swamp. It still grows quite well in these sites.

How is it used?

This sago is harvested, pounded, washed and the starch collected in much the same way as for other sago. In Bougainville, people normally only use it during times of food shortage or when they wish to hold a feast and need large amounts of food.

NOTES

There are 8 Metroxylon species. This palm has very large leaves which provide excellent thatch for house rooves. The seeds were also sold as “ivory nuts” for button manufacture.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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