

Larouman/Schnosiphonarouma:

LAROUMAN AND ITS USES IN THE KALINAGO TERRITORY

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Larouman Plant

The Larouman originated from the Orinoco basin in South America, and was introduced to Dominica by the first Amerindian settlers together with other plants such as manioc, pineapple, papaya, sugar apple, and other medical plants and herbs.

The plant has to be cultivated, and can grow in conditions ranging from five hundred to two thousand feet above sea level. More favourable conditions are along river banks, on the edge of water logged areas and in the rain forest.

The plant is tall with leaves shaped like a Kalinago paddle on an erect and long stem. It grows to an average height of ten feet. The Larouman takes about two to three (2-3) years to reach maturity. At this stage it blossoms and is ready to harvest.

Methods of harvest: The best time to harvest is from last quarter to new moon. Harvest during that period guaranties that the material is naturally preserved.

The primary use of the Larouman is for basket making. The Larouman has been in use by the Kalinago people for many centuries. The making of baskets, ropes, nets as well as building houses (carbet/mwina) was the work of the men. The Larouman, which was called Aoroman by the Kalinago, was the basic raw material for making baskets. They made various forms of basket to be used as chest, panniers, suit cases, as well as catolis (a form of backpack used by the Kalinago to carry tubers, fruits and fish. The matapi and the hibichet were made and utilized for the preparation of cassava and other products of the manioc.

Presently in the Kalinago territory the Larouman is used in the making

of baskets. However, due to demand and the increased number of visitors to the territory, many individuals have entered the craft industry, and as a result, many more designs and ornaments are made from the Larouman



Larouman Colouring Pit

reed. This includes earrings, bracelets, head bands, jewellery boxes, wife leader, baby cribs, hats, laundry baskets, purses etc.

Working with or making craft work using Larouman is very tedious; the process or preparation is almost like a ritual. After harvest the stalk has to be split into four equal parts by using a simple technique. First, two cuts are made criss-crossed at the top of the large part of the reed. It has to be split open enough to place two small sticks (3 in. long) in the opening, and split down gradually to the end. A knife is used to remove the excess inner reed. The split reed is then placed in the sun to dry to acquire a brown colour. To get the black colour the dry reed is cleaned and buried in a mud hole. The Kalinago producers prepare a special mud hole for that purpose. In a week's time the strands are taken from the mud, washed and left to dry in the sun so as to remove the odour. Other colours are acquired by using tan for pink and rubbing saffron on the strands for a yellow colour. To get white the opposite side of the strand is used.



Dried Larouman

The waste material, what the craft producer calls the bouden (belly of Larouman), is used to start a fire. It is also used as filler for the handles for some basket in making a flambo (traditional torch). The Bouden Larouman is placed in the centre to ensure the fire keeps on burning.



Craft made with Carouman