- Where: Chiquinquirá, Boyacá

Region: AndesMaterial: tagua.



Tagua accessories

A very special plant known as "tagua" (Phytelephas seemannii, Phytelephas macrocarpa) or vegetable ivory grows in the thick tropical rainforests of Colombia. This unattractive looking thorny palm has an average height of five to six meters and takes 15 years to begin to bear fruit. From then on, the plant yields three harvests per year.

The tagua nut

In its natural state, the tagua is similar to a nut called "mococha" and is full of seeds. It is hard, smooth, opaque, and bone-colored, and its texture resembles ivory. The nut requires between 6 and 12 months to ripen, during which the seed becomes harder, acquires its final thickness, and its color changes from white to light ochre. The ripe nut measures between three and six cm in length.

Accessories made of tagua appeal to women around the world

Characteristics of the tagua nut

The features that identify the quality of this vegetable raw material and make it such an esteemed product are its hardness and the similarity of its color to animal ivory.

Tagua: uses and products

The tagua began to be exploited in colonial times when the Spanish settled on the American continent. Since the very first contact of the foreigners with the plant, the tagua nut was used for making buttons, umbrella and walking stick handles, napkin holders, combs, chess pieces, piano keys, letter openers, and other utensils.

Centuries later, the invention of plastics did away with the popularity of tagua. And high quality items began to be made from animal ivory.

Let's save the elephants by using tagua!



Tagua accessories

Thanks to the cries of ecologists, in recent years natural materials begin to assert themselves again over artificial materials, and the tagua of Colombian rainforests turns out to be the salvation of elephants.

Present world trends to conserve the environment and the prohibition of hunting elephants and rhinoceroses for their ivory forced great European and North American designers like Christian Dior, Yves Saint Laurent, and Versace to turn to natural materials for their collections. This is why the tagua has ceased to be a humble palm tree to become a valuable product in world markets.

Tagua handicrafts in Colombia

Tagua is similar to animal ivory because of its hardness and color

Colombian artisans are experts in the manufacture of veritable jewels. The greatest tagua artists come from Chiquinquirá, a city famous for its cathedral and miraculous virgin, located three hours from Bogotá, in the department of Boyacá. The Chiquinquirá artists specialize in decorative miniatures (chess pieces, nativity scene figurines), several of which are in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Nowadays, Colombian artists use this material for making all kinds of decorative items: bracelets, picture frames, letter openers, figurines, and accessories like earrings, necklaces, and bracelets that attract the attention of women from around the world.

If you like tagua, you may be interested in:

- Other handicrafts: <u>Autochthonous materials</u> and <u>ruana</u>.
- Festivals in Villa de Leyva: Wind, kite and Lights.
- Bogotá: An inexhaustible Region.