Tagua is one of the most sought after natural materials in the international market for the manufacture of accessories.

Just as the fertility of the Colombian soil is unlimited, so is the ingenuity of artisans in finding ways to take advantage of natural resources to make numerous articles for various uses. Tagua is one of these highly useful materials.

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Tagua accessories / Photo by El Andariego - Inexmoda Cámara Lúcida/

The various forms of tagua

Tagua is extracted from a tree that grows in the tropical rainforests of northwestern South America and whose parts are appropriate for various uses.

Its root has medicinal properties, houses are thatched with its leaves, floors are manufactured with its stems, and its seeds or nuts make possible unlimited creations for attire, decoration, and entertainment.

Close to 15 years must elapse before the spiny palm tree renders the nuts containing its first fruits.

Close to 15 years must pass before the spiny palm tree renders its first fruits, but beginning with the first, there will be three harvests a year, and many artisans and designers will be waiting for the attractive seeds they will turn into innovative designs.

Tagua has its main artists among Embera Indians and the artisans in the towns of Chiquinquirá and Ráquira, department of Boyacá, who will transform it into smoothly finished items. Necklaces,

bracelets, and miniature domino and chess sets are only a few of the shapes they give to the tagua seed.

Tagua or vegetable ivory

Tagua is used to replace haute couture elements, such as buttons, and walking cane handles, thus saving the lives of elephants.

Although at times, tagua has been displaced by plastic, its discovery was a lifesaver in decreasing the actions of human predators in search of elephant ivory. Since the texture, hardness, and colors of tagua replace those of elephant ivory, over time tagua became known as "vegetable ivory".

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Tagua accessories / Photo by El Andariego - Inexmoda Cámara Lúcida/

In its natural state, a tagua nut is like an off-white, opaque, and smooth almond. After a few months, it hardens, thickens, acquires an ochre hue and grows to six centimeters. This is a raw material with varied uses in the course of time: from buttons, to handicrafts, to fashion jewelry.

As a handicraft, tagua is easily found in marketplaces of towns like Ráquira and Chiquinquirá. Visitors will be pleasantly surprised by the creations of hard-working men and women and will surely demand their products. Gradually, tagua gained prestige and passed from being a material for domestic use to being exhibited on the streets of the world.

From artisanal work to fashion walkways

In href="international-tourist/what-to-do/history-and-tradition/fairs-and-festivals/july/medellins-colombiamoda">Colombia’s fashion walkways, the use of tagua in clothing and accessories has been in charge of designers like Liliana Aristizábal, whose designs include the manufacture of rings and bracelets with natural flowers, dyed, dehydrated and adhered to tagua.

{gallery}turistainternacional/Quehacer/informeespecial/tagua/galeria{/gallery}

Thus, while Colombian women permanently ask for tagua jewelry and accessories, consumers of all kinds search for decorative objects, games, picture frames, pipes, and whatever the ingenuity of creators may offer. This is admirable work thanks to which famous world designers came to know of the existence of tagua and began to use it in designs for attiring their models.

Do you like natural materials? You may also like to learn about:

- Fique from Guacamayas
- Coconut handicrafts and Handicrafts in Werregue
- Sombrero vueltiao
- Or Colombia's main export product Emeralds