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Attalea funifera

BAHIA PIASSAVA is a palm. It is native to Brazil.

It is also known as Bahia coquilla, Bahia piassaba palm, Coquilla, Piassaba palm, and Piassava fibre; and in flower language (as for all palms), is said to be a symbol of victory.

The palm's unusual growth during its first 4-5 years protects it from fire. The seeds grow down into the ground and produce an underground stem of up to 4½ ft. long from which leaves appear. Only after this initial period does the trunk then begin to form.

Firm, resilient, light to dark chocolate coloured fibre is extracted from leaf stalks.

The fruit (or nuts) of the palm have been exported from Brazil for their edible oil that has been used commercially to make margarine.

The moisture-resistant fibre first attracted attention in Britain when it entered the country as packing, particularly around sugar cases on goods imported from Brazil in the mid-19th Century. Broom manufacturers recognized Piassava fibre's advantages and since then it has been used for brush and broom heads for street cleaning and domestic use.

The finer and more flexible strands of fibre are hand woven into twine, and the nuts, highly polished, are used for carving.