

*Metroxylon sago*

[Synonyms : *Metroxylon rumphii*, *Metroxylon squarrosum*]

**SAGO** (English, Italian) is a palm. Native to Malaysia, India and Indonesia it has a towering cluster of flowers.

It is also known as *Ambulung* (Javanese), *Kirai* (Javanese), *Metroksilo sagua* (Esperanto), *Palma da stoffe* (Italian), Pearl sago, Pohon sago, Prickly sago palm, *Rembia* (Malay), *Sago ag* (Turkish), *Sagonier* (French), Sago palm, *Sago palme* (German), *Sagou* (French), *Sagoulier* (French), *Sagu* (Italian, Malay), *Sagu chaval* (Indian), and *So-muk-mien* (Chinese); and in flower language (as for all palms) is said to be a symbol of victory.

Stems flower after about 12-15 years and then die.

As the starch in the trunk is depleted when flowers are produced, the palm is felled 2-3 years' beforehand (the timing for this is often indicated when the leafstalks change colour and the leaves shorten). The trunk is cut into 3 ft. or more lengths and the starch is separated from the pith. The pith is ground, washed repeatedly, filtered and then dried to produce small pellets, grains or flakes.

*Sagu* is a local Malaysian name for this plant.

This is the primary source of commercial sago. One tree can produce 250-1200 lb. of starch. The sago itself (if not exported) is eaten locally – often as a rice substitute (*Oryza*) just before the rice harvest. It is used to make a type of porridge as well as bread and cakes. For many Malaysians sago broth is also enjoyed as an aphrodisiac.

Exported sago is most often used for making milk puddings and is considered by many to be an easily digestible, nutritious food suitable for convalescents. This starch also offers a source of flour and a thickening agent for the food industry. It has been used by the textile industries in processing material too.

Locally the remains after sago extraction, together with the pith, have been fed as a fattening food to pigs.

In some areas the pith, itself is eaten after it has been roasted. The fruit harvested from those palms that are allowed to flower have also been eaten locally.

Both the sago and the sap can be used to make alcohol.

Leaves have been employed locally for thatching, particularly in Malaysia and Thailand. While the leafstalks have not only provided bottle stoppers but also lining for insect boxes. Strips of leaflets, pieces of leafstalks and leaflet midribs have been woven into baskets and matting.

Apart from its local use to make dugout canoes (or troughs for preparing the sago) the trunk's thin outer layer has also been used in Indonesia to make hats and in Malaysia to make buckets and, for one particular tribe, darts.