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CARLUDOVICA PALMATA IN BROOMMAKING

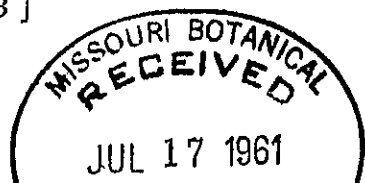
BY
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Carludovica palmata Ruiz & Pavon is best known as the source material for "Panama" hats, the majority of which are manufactured in Ecuador (2).¹ The leaves are also used to a lesser extent for matting, curtains, roofing, baskets, cigar-cases, purses, fly swatters and brooms (2, 3, 4). The petioles, when divided into strips, are used for making brooms in Honduras (1).

At the eastern base of the Cordillera Oriental in the Comisaría del Putumayo in southern Colombia, I recently encountered a household industry of broommaking from the dried leaf blades of *Carludovica palmata*, known locally as *iraca*. The brooms are made sporadically throughout the year at the convenience of the women of the household and are sold to an agent in the nearby town of Mocoa for twenty to twenty-five centavos each. Sent to the markets in the highland city of Pasto, they are resold for fifty to sixty centavos.

The procedure of broommaking begins with the collection of young, partially expanded leaf blades from plants in the vicinity of the house. They are spread on the ground near the home to dry in the sun for about four days, after which they are hung over a line strung be-

¹See References.



tween posts of the porch roof. Here they remain indefinitely until the housewife makes or obtains a light cord of *cabuya* (*Agave* spp.). When she is ready to begin to make a broom, the remaining two to four centimeters of petiole are cut from the leaves with a machete, but the leaf veins (or fibres) are carefully left coherent at their

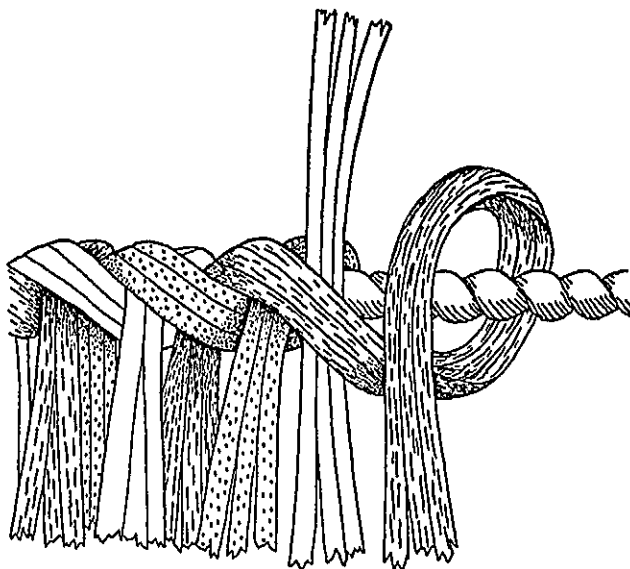


FIGURE 1. Method of tying bundles of fibres to the cord. The center of each bundle is placed against the near side of the cord and the upper half of the previous bundle is brought down in front, looped around the cord and pulled snug.

bases and are then pulled apart by hand. Why this is not done in one action with the machete is not apparent, for separating the fibres by hand takes several seemingly unnecessary minutes. Perhaps conserving the tough bases of the fibres affords the product a longer life.

The cord is now stretched tautly across a corner of the porch at a height of about three feet. While working in a sitting position, the woman finds this a convenient height for making the broom. Beginning near one end,

she ties small bundles of the fibres at their centres to the cord so that both ends hang down (text fig. 1). Each knot may be tied with from three to about fifteen fibres, but the number is relatively constant for each broom. When many fibres are used, the knots are large, giving the completed product a knobby aspect at the top. It is unlikely that the life of the broom is different with either method, since both types of broom contain an equal number of fibres; possibly the size of bundle used for knotting caters to various aesthetic values of the consumers. Certainly knotting with large bundles is a more rapid method. Because some brooms are knotted with small bundles of fibres, it may be that aesthetic considerations are of more importance in this area than is economy of time.

The fibres are tied closely along the cord for a distance of about one and a half meters, and when finished look like a grass skirt about twenty-five centimeters long. Untied from the porch railing, this "skirt" is rolled spirally on the end of a stick and securely bound. A few fibres which are too long are then trimmed off the end with a machete.

When the broom is made for home consumption it is immediately provided with a handle. When it is to be sent to urban centers, however, it is rolled into a bundle without a handle, for the consumer simply unrolls a worn out "skirt" from his old broomstick and replaces it with the new one.

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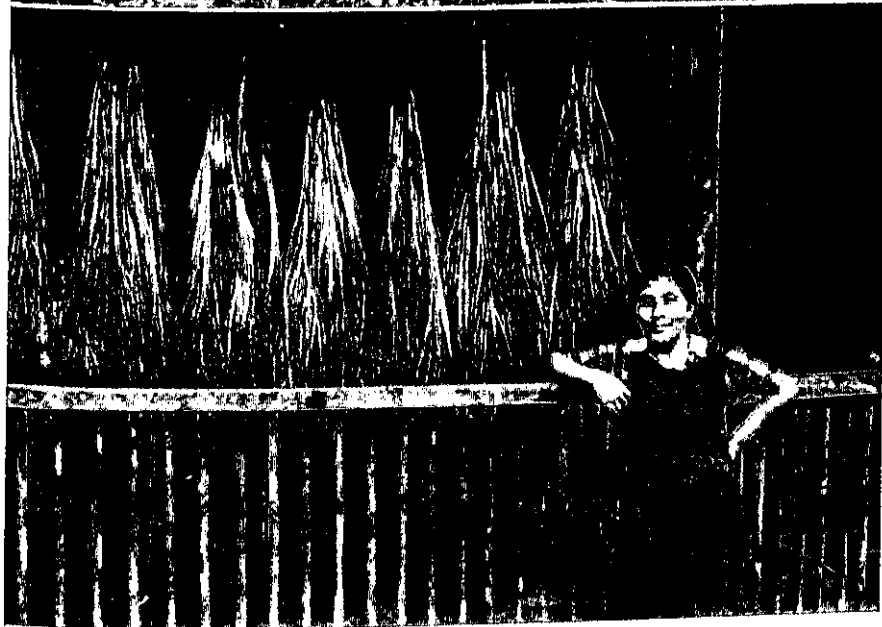
EXPLANATION OF THE ILLUSTRATION

PLATE XXV. (*Upper*) *Carludovica palmata* Ruiz & Pav. near Mocoa, Comisaría del Putumayo, Colombia.

(*Lower*) Housewife with dried leaf blades of *C. palmata* on porch.

Photographs by M. L. BRISTOL

PLATE XXV



EXPLANATION OF THE ILLUSTRATION

PLATE XXVI. (*Upper*) Tying bundles of 3-5 fibres to the cord, as in Fig. 1.

(*Lower left*) A new broom before trimming (left), and an old worn one (right).

(*Lower right*) Top of broom securely bound to handle. Bundles of 8-10 fibres were tied to the cord in this example.

Photographs by M. L. BRISTOL

PLATE XXVI

