

Guazuma ulmifolia caulote

at Parque Nacional Tikal



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Guazuma ulmifolia is one of the more common fruit trees in Guatemala. Everyone I speak with out in the countryside say they have eaten the fruit when they were children.

Yet the tough wooden-like outside of the fruits, and the almost total lack of soft insides, makes me wonder why in the world do people make the effort to eat this?

The answer is probably the chemicals which are inside the fruit. You could do a dissertation on the flavors available in this plant. Indeed a flavoring for a very popular drink is inside the seed pod. There will be separate FLAAR Reports on other aspects of *Guazuma ulmifolia*. That additional FLAAR Report will provide a bibliography.

The present PDF is primarily to help visitors to Tikal to recognize the tree by its fruits or flowers.

We have found *Guazuma ulmifolia* flowering and fruiting during the months of March and April. I estimate it flowers and fruits other months as well. Since each year fewer children make the effort to eat this (because on TV they see advertisements for addictive junk food), you can see lots of trees with the dry fruits still on the branches.

Since the tree is common throughout Guatemala (and neighboring countries) and since you can find many trees around Tikal, this FLAAR Report will work to introduce this tree to visitors to Guatemala (and to archaeologists and ethnographers who wish to learn about Maya diet of the last thousand years).

I lived in Tikal for 12 months in 1965 (yes, almost half a century ago). I then developed the Yaxha national park during five seasons during the 1970's. But I will admit that I was totally unaware of this tree. Frankly in some parts of the country (such as the dryer parts around Rio de los Esclavos, Departamento of Santa Rosa) the tree looks more like a giant roadside weed. So the *Guazuma ulmifolia* is not the kind of tree which attracts attention such as a ceiba, or a large fruit such as annona, or colorful flowers such as palo blanco (whose flowers are ironically pure yellow).



So this FLAAR Report seeks to introduce to the world a tree of rather uninspiring appearance. But whose nut-sized fruit hides flavorful secrets. We will be discussing the “inner secrets” of the fruit later this year.

While on the subject of the trees ragged appearance, it is worth pointing out that grows in challengingly different eco-systems: Santa Rosa and El Peten are about as dry vs seasonally wet as you can get. In some areas of Guatemala I would not be surprised to see cactus plants near a *Guazuma ulmifolia* tree.

This seed is a source of food for many mammals like coati, deer, peccary and lowland paca.

Family: Sterculiaceae. This is the same family as cacao.

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All the leaves usually drop off the tree, so you can easily see the fruits.





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