



*Pachira  
aquatica*

# Zapotón



FLAAR Reports

Rio Dulce area, Izabal, Guatemala  
Nicholas Hellmuth



*Pachira aquatica* zapotón photograph by Nicholas Hellmuth



*Pachira aquatica* zapotón

*Pachira aquatica* trees are members of the Bombacaceae Family. This tree is common in several parts of Guatemala, including at the Tikal National park (around the water holes) and along Rio Dulce.

The fruit is the same color as a zapote and same color as a chico zapote. Thus it is not much surprise that the fruit is called zapotón (giant zapote). You can probably spell it also sapotón.

The flowers of *Pachira aquatica* are gorgeous. Their smell, both of fresh flowers and even old dead flowers is enticing. The Classic Maya would have been well aware of all these aspects of *Pachira aquatica*.

Most of the *Pachira aquatica* trees around the hotel Bruno's Hotel and Marina are the height of a three or four story building. This is much higher than any *Pachira aquatica* in AutoSafari Chapin (possibly the trees in Izabal are much older?).

Although many trees in the Bombacaceae Family have spines (such as the Ceiba), I rarely notice any spines, thorns, or prickles on the trunks of these *Pachira aquatica* in Guatemala.



Spines on a zapotón tree, Rio Dulce area, Izabal, November 2011, Photo by Sofia Monzon



The Hotel Bruno's is a marina on the shore of Rio Dulce, Departamento of Izabal, Guatemala. It is typical of this tree to grow directly on the shore of some rivers and lakes. Yet I do not remember any of this tree along the Rio de la Pasion, Peten, or its tributaries such as Arroyo Pucte or Arroyo Petex Batun.

There were many more fruits on the trees in AutoSafari Chapin during the summer (several miles from the Pacific Coast of Guatemala, not far from El Salvador). Very few fruits on the trees along Rio Dulce in late November. In other words, the Rio Dulce trees had hundreds of flowers but very few fruits.

The trees along Rio Dulce were blooming profusely the week of November 21st 2011.

There were several young seedlings within a few centimeters of the shore of Rio Dulce that we noticed in front of one of the hotels.



*Pachira aquatica* zapotón open flower photograph by Sofia Monzon in Izabal Rio Dulce 2011



About a hundred meters from the river, along the edge of a field, some local farmer had planted a row of hundreds of seedlings to make a living fence. Here there was no sitting water nor was it close enough to any water for the roots to ever reach water. The young trees were between one meter and one and a half meters tall. So clearly the trees grow acceptably away from water (once they get started). Obviously I do not know if the farmer transplanted them from the shore, or simply planted seeds.





*Pachira aquatica* zapotón flower photograph by Sofia Monzon in Izabal Rio Dulce 2011



## If you wish to obtain Zapotón fruits, seeds, or young trees

If you wish to grow *Pachira aquatica* yourself, you can obtain seeds, or seedlings, from Kevin Lock, e-mail: [kevinlock2001@yahoo.com](mailto:kevinlock2001@yahoo.com).

Kevin is very adept at doing “magic” with the zapotón flower pods. He can make them go from a bud, to full flower, in 1 second. Rather than spoiling his act, best if you have him do this in front of you with a real bud. Quite a remarkable feat.

First posted late November 2011, shortly after seeing so many *Pachira aquatica* in full flower during our four day visit in the Rio Dulce area.



*Pachira aquatica* zapotón flower photograph by Sofia Monzon in Izabal Rio Dulce 2011