

The Use of Medicinal Plants by the Cultural Descendants of African People in Brazil

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RESUMEN. Son presentados datos etnobotánicos sobre el uso de plantas por los herederos culturales de los africanos en Brasil. El trabajo de campo fue conducido en la ciudad de Recife, estado de Pernambuco. Se informan los nombres comunes y científicos y los usos de 60 especies. Esta nota también informa sobre la planta conocida por Jurema [*Mimosa tenuiflora* (Willd.) Poir.] y hace algunos comentarios sobre los usos de plantas alucinógenas.

SUMMARY. Ethnobotanical data on plants which are used by cultural descendants of african people in Brazil are reported. The work field was carried in the city of Recife, state of Pernambuco (Brazil). Common and scientific names and data on plant use are given for 60 species. This note also reports on the plant known as Jurema [*Mimosa tenuiflora* (Willd.) Poir.] and comments on some aspects on the use of hallucinogenic plants.

INTRODUCTION

Both african and afro-brazilian cultures show similarities in the use of several plants. The slave trade route and european colonization were responsible for the introduction and application of some species to the New World¹. The symbolic and therapeutic use of plants in Africa and Brazil are based generally on identical principles.

Many different authors have stressed the importance and significance of plants for the cultural descendants of african people in Brazil²⁻⁴. In the traditional system of the afro-brazilian cults, a large number of species are used in medicine, rituals, and as food. Other uses of plants are essentially based on beliefs, values, symbols or signs. The symbolic use is a significant aspect of tradition in Africa as well as in Brazil. Several species are sacred with spiritual powers as, for example, certain *Ficus* species.

A detailed study of the use of medicinal plants by the cultural descendants of african

people in Brazil remains to be carried out. Although many aspects of afro-brazilian culture have been addressed in detail, only a few reports exist on the plants currently in use. In this study an attempt was made to record the various medicinal plants currently in use by the cultural descendants of african people in the state of Pernambuco (Brazil).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Collection of plant material

Plants were collected from different localities in the state of Pernambuco (Brazil), between 1992 and 1995. Voucher specimens were identified and deposited at the UFP herbarium, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco. With the exception of a few common cultivars, all species were collected and stored as permanent voucher specimens.

Ethnobotanical data collection

Ethnobotanical data were obtained by inter-

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cultos afrobrasileños, Etnobotánica, Plantas alucinógenas, Plantas medicinales.

KEY WORDS: Afro-brazilian cults, Ethnobotany, Hallucinogenic plants, Medicinal plants.