

**Bolivia:** Palmilla

**Brazil:** Caranaí, caraná, buritirana

**Colombia:** Zííyaña, yumuna (Witoto)

**Peru:** Aguajillo; bie ne ñi (Maijuna)

**Venezuela:** Moriche negra; caraña (Yekuana), kohere (Yanomama)

**Status:** Wild



**Fig. 48.1** Aguaje (*Mauritia flexuosa*) palms interspersed with clumps of smaller aguajillo (*Mauritiella armata*) along a stream. Opposite Tamshiyacu, Loreto, Peru, 6-18-06

Two species of *Mauritiella* are currently recognized. *Mauritiella aculeata* is restricted to black waters in the middle and Upper Rio Negro watershed, while *M. armata* is widespread in wetlands throughout the Amazon Basin, the Guianas and northeastern and central Brazil (Henderson 1995: 77; Ferreira and Stohlgren 1999). Both are slender with fan-shaped fronds similar to *Mauritia flexuosa*, only with shorter trunks and smaller leaves. Furthermore, the trunks are armed with spines: hence the species names *armata* (armed) and *aculeata* (sting). Unlike *M. flexuosa* though, *Mauritiella* palms are multi-stemmed and usually found in clumps. Both species of *Mauritiella* produce edible fruits.



**Fig. 48.2** A clump of *Mauritiella aculeata* along a black water river. Rio Tiquié, affluent of the Uaupés, Amazonas, Brazil, 10-26-12

Known as aguajillo in Peru, *Mauritiella armata* thrives along streams, the margins of lakes, swamps, and seasonally-flooded savannas up to 900 m in the foothills of the Andes. Aguajillo fruits are scaly like those of aguaje, only smaller and are pale orange rather than deep orange or red. People use their teeth to peel the thin skin before eating the lime-yellow pulp that surrounds the single reddish-brown

seed. The fruits are also made into juice, such as on Marajó Island at the mouth of the Amazon.



**Fig. 48.3** Aguajillo (*Mauritiella armata*) fruits in a street market. Mercado Belén, Iquitos, Loreto, Peru, 6-21-06

The fact that aguajillo is armed with sharp conical spines rules out any of the “sustainable” fruit harvesting methods that are being promoted for aguaje (*Mauritia flexuosa*) in Peru. Although not as tall as aguaje, aguajillo still reaches some 20 m, so it is not practical to use poles to cut or knock down the fruits. Fruit gatherers typically chop down aguajillo with an ax or even a machete because the trunks are so slim. Fruits that have evaded parakeets fall to the ground when ripe, where they can be picked up and eaten as a snack. But most aguajillo fruits entering markets come from trees that have been felled.



**Fig. 48.4** Shopper testing an aguajillo fruit in a street market. Mercado Belén, Iquitos, Loreto, Peru, 6-21-06

Aguajillo produces fewer fruits than aguaje, with only one fruit bunch containing several dozen fruits, in contrast to the thousands of fruits that can be encountered on a single aguaje palm (Smith et al. 2007: 76). In the Peruvian Amazon, aguajillo fruits enter urban markets from May through August, spanning the tail end of the rainy season and the beginning of the dry season. Near Manaus, caranaí is in fruit in December at the beginning of the rainy season. Given the palm's extensive range, it is not surprising that some trees are bearing fruit in the rainy season, while other produce fruit during the drier period. Known as caranaí or caraná in the Brazilian Amazon, the fruits turn up occasionally in the street markets of Belém (Cavalcante 2010: 93).



**Fig. 48.5** River dweller gathering fruits of *Mauritiella armata* after felling the palm. The silvery undersides of the fronds are characteristic of this water-loving palm. Rio Nahuapa, affluent of the lower Tigre, Loreto, Peru, 7-2-06

*Mauritiella armata* forms clumps of up to a dozen palms on seasonally flooded savannas, especially on sandy soils, such as in the vicinity of Mosqueiro and in the Tauá watershed on Marajó Island, both in the Amazon estuary. Organic matter from fallen fronds tends to pile up at the base of the palms, thereby providing a drier platform for other plants less tolerant of flooding to colonize wetlands (Smith 2002: 106). In this manner, *Mauritiella armata* is a pioneer species in seasonally flooded savannas, eventually giving way to forest provided that fires are not too intense.



**Fig. 48.6** Orange aguajillo (*Mauritiella armata*) fruits and red aguaje (*Mauritia flexuosa*) fruits in a street market. Mercado Belén, Iquitos, Loreto, Peru, 6-21-06