

**SAW PALMETTO:  
(SABAL SERRULATA.  
SERENOA SERRULATA.)**

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Saw Palmetto: (*Sabal Serrulata*. *Serenoa Serrulata*.) by Edwin M. Hale

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**EDWIN M. HALE**

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# SAW PALMETTO.

(*Sabal Serrulata. Serenoa Serrulata.*)

ITS HISTORY, BOTANY, CHEMISTRY, PHARMA-  
COLOGY, PROVINGS, CLINICAL  
EXPERIENCE

AND

THERAPEUTIC APPLICATIONS,

BY

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AUTHOR OF "NEW REMEDIES," "PRACTICE OF  
MEDICINE," ETC., ETC.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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The drug which forms the subject of this treatise belongs to the great family *Palmaceæ* (Palms), a large order, which is pre eminent in the whole world of plants for the grandeur and beauty attained by many of the species. They are mainly tropical, there being but five species in the United States. These range in size from the dwarf palmetto of the sands of the coast, not more than a foot high, to the Royal Palm, found in the depth of the primeval forests of the extreme southern portion of Florida, which towers to the height of two hundred feet.

No order of plants has been put to greater uses for ornamentation or utility. There is hardly a place in art in which it has not been used. It is actually indispensable to the life of many tribes and nations of human beings. Its members supply food, beverage, shelter and a thousand other means of sustenance and comfort to the inhabitants of nearly every country in the tropics.

This great family numbers over one hundred species. From these we get many kinds

of food, such as sago, sugar, oil, starch, wine. The cocoanut forms the food of millions. The natives and early settlers of Florida, found in the berries, and the great terminal bud of some species, food which is not at all unpalatable. Those who desire to investigate the economical uses of the Palms should read "Popular History of Palms," or Martin's great work, "Historie Palmorrium."

Among horticulturists the Palms are great favorites, and the great conservatories of the world abound in beautiful and elegant specimens. The genus *Sabal* embraces six or eight species, five of which are found in Florida and other Gulf States. Some officious botanist removed the Saw Palmetto from this genus and made it a monotypic member of a new genus *Serenoa*, just as another removed the blue palmetto and named it *Chamærops*.

There was no occasion for such a change. It only renders the study of botany more difficult and serves no practical use.



## SABAL SERRULATA.

(*Saw Palmetto.*)

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This plant grows abundantly in the sandy soils of the sea coast and sea islands of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, and may perhaps extend into Alabama, Louisiana and Texas. The best of the territory inhabited by it extends inland from the coast eight or ten miles. The nearer the sea the more vigorous the luxuriance of its growth. Like most crops, its fruit is most abundant in alternate years. It is the common plant of the section of the country in which it grows, forming palmetto scrubs which extend in unbroken ranges for hundreds of miles, and are, from their density and the saw-like edges of the leaves, almost impassable for human beings. The beach, extending from Mosquito Inlet to Jupiter Inlet, in Florida, is one vast scrub, over one hundred miles long and from one to three miles wide, broken only by live oak hummocks along the creeks and inlets. The cutting of roads through these palmetto scrubs is not one of the least of labors new settlers have to undergo.

This species has lately come into use as a valuable material for the manufacture of paper. The finest and most durable paper is made from it and it will prove a great source of wealth to the people of the Southern States. The Saw Palmetto is of great use to the inhabitants. With the leaves they form a substantial thatch for their houses, and hunters can readily make from it convenient huts that last for years. The leaves are also collected, dried, put up in bales and sold for paper stock. The tough, fibrous roots, resembling in texture the husks of the cocoanut, are easily formed into scrubbing brushes. These roots contain a large amount of potash salts, and may be, in time, a source of that valuable alkali.

The Saw Palmetto berries, or more properly drupes, ripen in October and November, and may be found until the middle of December. They are about the size of the olive, dark purple in color, and contain a large quantity of juice, and a pit shaped like that of the olive. The berries are at first exceedingly sweet to the taste, but in a few seconds this is followed by an acrid, pungent sensation that spreads to the fauces, nasal mucous membrane and larynx. This is in turn succeeded by a feeling of smoothness in all those parts, as if they had been coated with oil. The general impression

is that of a sweet and decidedly strong, though not unpleasant, butyraceous taste, which increases with the age of the fruit.

The seeds are enveloped in a tough, fibrous membrane, are very hard, and when cut open present a white, oily, glistening substance, which burns readily with a blue flame and gives off the odor of roasted coffee. The oil, or rather oils—for there are two, a volatile oil soluble in alcohol, and a fixed oil, are obtained from the expressed juice by allowing it to stand for some time. In a few days the oils rise to the surface, and the liquid is resolved into three layers. First, a yellow volatile oil, next, a thicker, grayish-brown, fixed oil, and then a yellowish, watery fluid, containing a large percentage of saccharine matter, richer, in fact, than cane juice itself. By evaporation this fluid yields a rich, golden syrup, which neither ferments nor candies, slightly retaining the peculiar taste of the fruit. When the berries are boiled in water, the volatile oil is dissipated, filling the atmosphere for a great distance with its pungent vapor, and producing dizziness and headache in those in the immediate neighborhood.

Considering the great and diversified power of the Saw Palmetto as a therapeutic agent, it