

**Ethnographic Research on Medicinal Uses of Local Fijian Botanicals in Nasinu  
Village, Vanua Levu, Fiji**

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## INTRODUCTION

Medicinal uses for botanicals is a practice used in all parts of the world, especially in indigenous cultures where access to pharmaceutical remedies may not be handy or affordable. Ethnographic research conducted in July of 2015 in Nasinu village in Natewa Bay, Vanua Levu, Fiji, produced several accounts of medicinal uses for local plants found in and around the village for common human ailments.

### Background/Objectives

Nasinu village is a small congregation of around five-hundred Fijian peoples. It is located at the very south end of Natewa Bay on Vanua Levu, Fiji. The main objectives of the ethnographic fieldwork was to learn what type of local plants were used to treat common human ailments in and around Nasinu village.

Many villagers have lived in the village all of their lives, but there are also many men and women who have either married into a family or moved to the village from other villages all around the islands of Fiji. Due to this mix of native Nasinu villagers and outside villagers, the information learned about medicinal uses is both local and country wide. Much of the knowledge is passed down from generation to generation (mainly with the women) and household to household. Information gathered during July 2015 was given by some of the Kevu family, including Joe, Kelesi, and their daughter Vika.

## INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Data collected on the medicinal uses of local botanicals from the Kevu family show that most common part of the plant used to treat ailments is the leaves. The leaves are generally crushed up in some form in order to release the juice that can be consumed or applied to wounds. One of the plant remedies involving crushed up kalambucidamu and guava leaves helped to alleviate menstrual cramps for graduate research assistant, Kendra L. Hein during her stay in the Kevu household. The adult women of the Kevu family, Vika and Kelesi, were the ones who suggested the remedy and were the ones who prepared it to Kendra.

The plant with the most abundant of uses seems to be the fruit from the coconut palm. Virgin coconut oil can be ingested or applied to the skin in order to treat common ailments, such as, skin rashes, skin diseases and constipation. One such use observed during the stay in the Kevu home was that of Vika applying virgin coconut oil to the neck and body of her youngest son Nemani to treat a skin rash he had. The results of the coconut oil application to the infant have yet to be determined due to the departure of Kendra Hein before the end of the field research time period. Although not medicinal uses, the coconut palm is also used for a variety of other things, such as, making jewelry, furniture, palm frond mats/baskets, and decorations.

Various plants within a village are used for a multitude of purposes including to treat common ailments, such as, headaches, diarrhea, menstruation cramps, toothaches, and more. A big question raised while conducting field research was knowing which plants the Kevu family used are native to Fiji and which plants have been introduced since colonization.

Botanical medicinal knowledge is something passed down from generation to generation and can vary from one family to the next. Other daily uses for local botanicals can include consumption (i.e. coconut, tava seeds), weaving of mats and fans (pandanus leaves), dyes (mango leaves), and even dental care (denoise). Future research, including additional ethnographic studies, need to be conducted in order to gain more insight to more uses for local flora.