

The adventurer's  
guide to the  
mysteries of

# THE AMAZON



## AN EXOTIC PHARMACY

By Professor M.C. Meyer

*A passionate spokesman for the potential of Amazonian pharmacology, Professor Mario Christian Meyer provides a privileged look into the future potential of Amazonian plant life. Trained as a neuropsychiatrist at Université Paris VII, he is presently a guest professor at the University of Paris as well as Deputy Governor and senior adviser to the Governor of Amazonas for international business development. He is also a senior expert of scientific, technological and industrial cooperation in biotechnology and environmental sciences to leading industrial groups around the world. As a liaison between medicine, science and business, the Brazilian-born Meyer represents a new kind of Amazonian advocate—dedicated to utilizing the resources of the planet in a life-supporting, Earth-supporting capacity for all involved.*

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The richness of Amazonian biodiversity constitutes a double treasure for specialists of “natural medicine;” first, the large variety of plants with therapeutic properties and second, the great diversity of mammals naturally extracting healing substances from these plants.

In response to the pressing need to discover new superior medicines in plant life in the face of growing epidemics like AIDS and other social and environmental illnesses, a new, exotic specialist has thus been inspired to arise within the scientific arena—the zoopharmacologist. These specialists study plants which animals use to treat their own illness (such as antibiotics) or to regulate certain vital biological functions, such as contraception.

For instance, among the uncountable varieties of monkeys in the southern regions of the Amazonian forest, we find the muriqui, the biggest monkey of the Americas, measuring about 70 centimeter in body) with a tail just as long. Apparent masters at controlling their own population, the females manage to reduce their fertility, thanks to the ingestion of certain leaves rich in isoflavonoides, which have a physiological effect similar to that of estrogen. Inversely, the same females have been found to ingest “*orelha de macaco*” ( monkey’s ear), a vegetable rich in a steroid that facilitates fertility. Scientists have discovered that these females often tend to chew on this plant during times of ovulation, suggesting that they may have the firm intention to be fertilized.

### OTHER MEDICINAL PLANTS

**Copaiba:** The copaiba tree can be found in copious amounts in the Amazon’s *terra firme* regions. Rich in beta-caryophyllene and copaene, its therapeutic property is antiviral and antipsoriasis. Its oil is anti-inflammatory, antirheumatic, and has other numerous healing properties. It’s also used in cases of chronic varicose ulcerations and pharyngitis.

**Crajiru:** This is a type of creeping plant used as an anti-inflammatory. The dry leaves contain tannins, quinones and alkaloids. The plant, often served as a tea, is used to counteract intestinal colic and uterine inflammation. Other therapeutic properties are used as an astringent and as a powerful anticheloid (to heal rough scar tissue). In Amazonas, silkworms fed crajiru leaves (rich in flavonoid pigment) produce red thread.

**Urucum:** The seeds of this plant, which contain carotenoidlike beta carotene (pro-vitamin A), have properties capable of increasing the pigmentation of fatty tissue and thus making the skin resistant with natural coloration (it contains an excellent UVB filter which acts as sunscreen). It is also a bioinsecticide, a cure and protection against insect bites. It can either be ingested as capsules or by cooking with it in powder form similar to that of paprika. For thousands of years Amerindians have used urucum for their body-painting rituals because of its bright color. They also mix the pulp which surrounds the seeds with the oil of the Amazonian fish to make a cream which protects against the sun and insect bites.