

## Participatory Native Fruit Tree Improvement

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Tropical forests are home to hundreds of fruit species, most of which are only known and consumed locally. Their selection and promotion in regional and national/international markets holds the promise of generating income from forest and agroforestry systems, adding value to intact vegetative cover. However, local management knowledge of these fruits needs to be better understood.

Additionally, superior genotypes of the fruit need to be propagated through vegetative means, namely grafting. This is not frequently carried out, but holds the greatest promise of capturing superior fruit types, reproducing them reliably and quickly, and supplying a marketable product.

Research was conducted in the Chinantla area of Oaxaca, Mexico on the "chinene" (*Persea schiedeana*), a locally important fruit tree (a relative of the avocado, *Persea Americana*). Discussions with residents revealed an interest in learning grafting techniques which initiated a collaborative research project to document local knowledge and management of *Persea schiedeana* and the diversity of fruit forms.

Local residents were trained in data collection and fruits were displayed for selection of superior quality. Seeds were sown in community nurseries to serve as root stock, with those selected planned for grafting in February following training workshops. Once the grafted trees are in production, local and regional markets may be entered.

This work suggests that by creating a dialogue between local residents and horticultural and ethnobotanical scientists, knowledge and tools can be shared which benefit all stakeholders and have great potential in creating income from intact managed forest systems and promoting tropical forest conservation.

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