



Seabeans

Imagine yourself floating at the mercy of the wind and currents thousands of miles from land; your destination unknown. Eventually you may come ashore on the sandy beaches of an island or on a distant continent. Thousands of tropical drift seeds and fruits make this remarkable voyage around the oceans of the world. Seabeans can come from as far as the Amazon, and drift ashore in Ireland. Due to the converging currents in the Gulf of Mexico, many of these seabeans drift ashore here at Padre Island National Seashore. Some of the most common ones include coconuts, hickory nuts, black walnuts, country almonds, hamburger beans, sea purses, Mary's beans, sea hearts, star nut palms and golf ball beans. Nestled among the seaweed, brought in by the last tide, these gems can be found.



a. golf ball pod (sea-coconut), *Manicaria saccifera* b. starnut plams, *Astrocaryum* sp. c. sea hearts, *Entada gigas* d. black walnut, *Juglans nigra* e. Mary's-Bean, *Merremia discoidesperma* f. hamburger bean, *Mucuna sloanei* g. sea purses, *Dioclea reflexa* h. tropical almond, *Terminalia catappa* i. gray and brown nickernuts, *Caesalpinia bonduc*, *Caesalpinia ciliata* j. little marbles, *Oxyrhynchus trinervius*

Myth and Mystery

Superstitions have developed around seabeans due to the many symbols people see in them. Some cultures even ascribe magical properties to seabeans. For example, the Mary's bean was revered because of the cross on its surface. In parts of Scotland, women believed that if they held the bean during labor they would have a safe delivery.

Seabeans were also used by various cultures to ward off evil spirits. According to one legend, "men and women of the board", known as surfers, once wore hamburger bean necklaces to ward off evil spirits in the sea. Nickernuts were worn as amulets to ward off the "Evil Eye." A popular legend in the Azores says the heart bean inspired Columbus' voyage to new land.

Origins

Seabeans originate from trees and vines found on tropical shores and in rain forests all over the world. These travelers fall from the plant into water ways such as the Amazon river and drift into the ocean. A majority of seabeans originate in the Carribean, Central America or South America, while some also grow in Florida.

Little marble seabeans are a rare find at Padre Island, as they originate in an area from Southern Mexico to Western Columbia. While the little marble comes from abroad, other seabeans such as the black walnut come from here in the United States. Black walnuts can be found in temperate areas and are brought here by rivers that spill into the Gulf of Mexico.

Uses

Many seabeans have been put to good use over the years, by various cultures. Some cultures made ointments out of sea beans while others created jewelry or boxes out of the beans they found. The tropical almond for example, was once used to make an ointment used for skin diseases. Little marble seabeans

and sea hearts are commonly used to make jewelry. The sea heart is also used to make snuff boxes and vesta boxes, which are used to hold matches. Today, sea beans continue to delight and fascinate the young and old alike as they comb the recent tideline for these hidden treasures.

