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HEVEA (RUBBER) SEEDS FOR HUMAN FOOD

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Use of seeds of Hevea for human food is traditional among some of the aborigines of Amazonia, and by some Indonesians. Although the seeds are customarily given long cooking, during World War II some European prisoners of war in Java ate seeds of Hevea after simply roasting them in the fire.

It is well-known that the seeds of Hevea are poisonous when raw. They are cyanogenic and may contain phytotoxins (poisonous lectins). Feeding tests on poultry and swine in Sri Lanka have shown that there are also unidentified growth-depressant and antifertility factors. In order to identify and evaluate the factors hindering use of the seeds of Hevea for human food a project has been initiated at the University of Southern California using seeds supplied by the Rubber Research Institute of Sri Lanka, Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia, and Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazonia, Brazil. Dependable means will be sought for counteracting the deleterious factors in order to make the seeds available for human food.

The methods already used successfully in Amazonia and Indonesia for preparing Hevea seeds for human food will be summarized so that gastronomically adventurous pioneers in Sri Lanka can try eating the seeds in order to determine the feasibility of using this potential source of human food. These trials should be made cautiously starting with small amounts and never exceeding moderate amounts.