

Medicine and Therapy



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Medicine and Therapy

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- 5 *Economy and Trade* by the Palau Society of Historians. [English, 1999] vi+13 pp.; 2 figs.; glossary; index
- 6 *Medicine and Therapy* by the Palau Society of Historians. [Palauan, 2000] vi+16 pp.; 6 figs.; glossary

Series editors Booklets 1-6: Florencio Gibbons, Lorne Holyoak and Vicky N. Kanai

The Traditional and Customary Practices Series provides information about Palauan culture in the Palauan language and in English. All booklets are abstracted from *Rechuodel* with additional information provided.

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English translation by Florencio Gibbons. This translation reflects the words of the Historians as closely as possible, and is based on DeVerne Reed Smith's translation of Palau Ethnography, "Rechuodel: Traditional Culture and Lifeways Long Ago in Palau". The English translation was edited to improve readability without changing the meaning.

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Medicine and Therapy

Medicine and the art of healing were important aspects of Palauan life in the old days. There was no established institution for the art of healing, so when someone got sick, he or she would look for people who knew the herbs and plants that would help him or her with their ailments.

Palauan medicines are derived from plants, leaves, vines, and weeds. Stone was an integral part of some medicine. In most cases, families had their own cures for small cuts and common ailments. In these cases, there would be different names for the same kind of herb or medicine that would cure the same kind of ailment.

There were also some medicines that accompanied a kind of sorcery, so these were very private and were not easily transferred to other people. This kind of knowledge usually stayed within the family and was looked upon as a family treasure or heirloom.

Listed below are some types or categories of Palauan medicines:

1. *Dechedechomël*: medicine to be masticated and swallowed, with the person in a stream with his or her head under water, or drinking water from the stream with the medicine;

2. *Remochel*: medicine that is wrapped in a cloth-like material and squeezed into a container of water. The potion is then drunk;

3. *Chilr*: ointment made of herbs and coconut oil or herbs by themselves and used to heal skin disease and also to keep away bad spirits;

4. *Cholaw*: medicine that is heated by a hot rock or heated over a fire by itself and used to rub on swollen body parts, joints, muscle aches and the like;

5. *Cholub*: medicine that heals bruises as well as swelling due to strains or clotted blood;

6. *Chosurech*: medicinal herbs boiled in water and used while still hot or warm to bathe and cleanse major wounds or cuts to help in the healing process;

7. *Sis*: ti plant used to prevent and treat sicknesses caused by evil spirits or the supernatural;

8. *Rsachel*: a combination of herbs pounded together with pestle and mortar and masticated and swallowed, rubbed on or smelled;

9. *Ongas*: herbs pounded together and taken by women to stop pregnancy or induce abortion;

10. *Techetachel*: medicines that are pounded by a club like implement.

The Art of Healing

When a person got sick, he or she could go out to the field and gather the herbs, if he or she knew the kind of medicinal plants that would cure the ailment in question. If a person did not know the kind of herbs needed the person would have sought out the help of someone knowledgeable in herbal medicine.

Omesumch is a kind of physical therapy used on strained, broken or fractured bones or bodily trauma. Massage also is done with medicines. The skills, techniques and knowledge of massage and the practice of medicine required in massaging are handed down from traditional sources.

Medical Practitioners

Medical practitioners were those who had the knowledge and skills to gather the right kinds of herbs to heal a sick person. Before a person offered treatment or administered any medicines, he or she would consult the spirits, if able to do so. If not capable of communicating with the spirits the healer would consult a person who was skilled in *ongelil* (sorcery) to find out the reason for or cause of the illness. Those experts searched for the cause of the illness by the methods listed below:

1. Using an act of sorcery that brought the clouds together to enable prophecy;
2. Reading and interpreting signals from the *lab* (a bush whose bark was used to make skirts) and the *sis* (ti plants);
3. Observing, reading and interpreting signals from the movements of spiders on their webs;
4. Reading and interpreting signals from the contents of a *tet* (purse or betel nut basket);
5. Using an act of sorcery to see ghosts and spirits of the dead and interpreting their actions;
6. Reading and interpreting signals from trees;
7. Observing, reading and interpreting actions, events, movements, and speech of people;
8. Measuring the betel nut bamboo lime shaker with the out-stretched thumb and middle finger (an act of sorcery);
9. Knotting coconut husk strings and interpreting the signals from the knots;
10. Breaking *temikel* (coconut leaf ribs) and or *kilkuld* (a type of fern) and interpreting them.

The medical practitioners were paid for their services, either with Palauan bead money or other means. The value of the piece of money given as payment for treatment was usually the smallest kind of Palauan bead money (*mong ra mengsang* or *delobeche*). At times, when a person could not afford to pay the bead money, he or his relatives would bring food and other goods to the healer as payment for services rendered.

Plants and Trees not Indigenous to Palau That Are Used as Medicine Now

Listed below are some plants that were introduced to Palau and are now used as medicine.

1. Mahogany
2. *Ochod* (Caroline cinnamon tree)
3. *Irang* (ylang-ylang; *Cananga odorata* (Lam.))
4. *Kerul a sokel* (candle bush)

Included in this publication are medicines adopted from a booklet called *Medicine of Micronesia*, under the sub-title "Palauan Medicine", which the Society of Historians consented to include in this book.

Ailments and Cures

What follows are common ailments identified in Palauan medicine and the cures usually undertaken to cure them.

Rusk and Suches (stomach cramps or stitches)

Gather five tips from the roots of pandanus and eleven sections of sugar cane. Pound the roots of pandanus and squeeze the sap into a container. Pound the sections of sugar cane and squeeze the sap into the container that has the pandanus sap. Next boil a cup of water and mix it with the other two ingredients and drink it. This will get rid of *rusk* or *suches*.

Ngasech rakd (enlargement of the scrotum)

Get five stocks of turmeric including the root. Pound the turmeric plant into a pulp, bundle it up in gauze and squeeze this in water. Get thirteen very young fruits of *ngel* (Indian mulberry). Drink the potion and eat the thirteen fruits of the *ngel*.

Medicine for women after birth

Gather twenty-one leaves of the *titimel* plant (amra tree); put them in a small pot with water. Heat the water with the leaves and give to the woman who just gave birth. This will help to reduce the stretch marks on her abdomen due to pregnancy.

Medicine for burns

When someone gets burned on the limbs, dip the burnt limb in water for at least thirty minutes. If there is no water available find an egg, crack it, separate the yolk from the white and use the egg white on the burn.

Remedy for eating poison fish

Grate two brown coconuts and squeeze the milk. Mix the coconut milk with sugar and cocoa. This has to be very sweet. Give it to the person who ate the poisoned fish to drink.

Centipede bite

Get a green papaya fruit, peel part of it so the milk-like sap starts dripping. Use the sap on the bite. This can also help when a jellyfish strikes someone.

Remedy for stomachache

Get five tips of *kebui* (pepper plant), three young leaves of *ongael* (*Phalleria nisidai* Kan.), three young leaves of *ngesil* (wedelia), three young leaves of *ngel*, and one young leaf of *chosm* (*Premna Obtusifolia* R. Br.). Pound all of the above together and swallow them with water.

Remedy for asthma

Gather seven stocks of the *keskus* weed (lemon grass). Wash them well, pound them into a pulp, wrap them in gauze, and put them in a cup. Boil water, pour that into the cup and drink it when you are thirsty. Continue for three weeks.

Remedy for headache

Pull up a small papaya plant, get all the roots. Get three roots from a lime tree; gather a handful of young leaves of *ngel*, a handful of young leaves of lime tree, a handful of young leaves of *chebeludes* (soapberry bush; *Allophyllus timorensis* Bl.), a handful of young leaves of *chedebsungel* (*Crataeva speciosa* Volk.), a section of bark from *chedebsungel*, a handful of flowers of the male papaya, a handful of flowers of *bngei* (*Polyscias nodosa* (Bl.) Seem.). Pound all

these ingredients together into a pulp, find an airtight container and put them in it. Open the container and smell the contents. Doing this should clear the sinus. When done close the container well so the odor will not escape. Use it for one week.

Remedy for runny ears

Gather the yellow leaves of the breadfruit tree (*meduu*). Pound the leaves and squeeze the sap into the infected ear. Use three drops per day for five days.

Medicine for diarrhèa

Find flowers of *chermall* (hibiscus) that are still in buds - collect eight of them. Chew them and swallow with water.

Remedy for nausea

Take a young coconut that is still soft in the shell. Open the young coconut and put 1/3 teaspoon salt in it, stir so the salt is melted, give it to the sick person to drink it all. Crack open the nut and give the soft shell to the person to eat. After that the person can eat and drink water.

Remedy for high blood pressure and diabetes

Gather three leaves from the soursop, three bunches of flowers from the male papaya, three midsections of papaya leave stems, three bunches of flowers from *kelsechedui* (*Verbenaceae negundo* var. *bicolor* (Willd.) H. J. Lam), and one aloe vera leaf. Put all these ingredients in a pot with water and boil to release the essences. Let stand and cool. Drink the potion, add more water and reheat. Continue drinking it until it becomes weak, then collect some more of the ingredients and repeat the process.

Remedy for rheumatism

Take a handful of *olumud* (desmodium), a handful of leaves of bullock heart (*ngel*), seven green fruits of the bullock heart, and two hedyotis (*kelel a malk*). Combine all ingredients and pound into a pulp. Take this medicine with water once a day for nine days. After the nine days are over, pick another nine fruits from the bullock and take per day for another nine days.

Remedy for skin disease

Gather a handful of *chedebsungel* leaves, a handful of *ngolm* (glochidion) leaves, a handful of *butcherchar* (pagoda plant) leaves, the bark of *chedebsungel* the width of an open palm of the hand and one big spoonful (tablespoon) of grated turtle shell. Combine all ingredients and pound into a pulp, put in a small pan, add coconut oil, and bring to a boil to release the essences. Let it cool down, and use as an ointment for the skin disease.

The following medicines and their uses were taken from a session of the Pacific Educational Conference held in Palau in 2000. The session was entitled "Herbal Medicines and Recipes."

Skin disease (itching)

Gather twenty leaves of *berdakl* (*Cayratia trifolia* (L) Quiz.) and one or two pieces of one-inch width of the bark of the same plant. Put the twenty leaves into a small pan, add water and boil it. Put a generous amount of coconut oil on the infected skin. While the water is still very warm use it to bathe the infected area of the skin. Afterward, roll the bark of the plant so that it resembles a straw; tie it and blow onto the infected skin.

Skin disease (itching)

Collect four young leaves of *riaml* (Pangi; Payan). Put these in a pan, add some coconut oil and boil. After it cools off, use the oil as ointment on the infected area, until the itching or rash is gone.

Minor Cuts

Take two or three leaves from *kekul a ius* (hanging club moss). Pound them well and put them on the cut. It helps to stop bleeding and speeds healing of the cut.

Remedy for the common cold

Pick four tender leaves of *chosm* and four tender leaves of *kesuk* (croton). Put these leaves in a pot with water and bring to a boil. Drink the water until you are well.

Remedy for fever

First gather four tender leaves of *bubeubedul* (ground cherry) and four tender leaves of *sausab* (soursop). Put the leaves in a pot with water and boil for a few minutes. Drink the potion as you would tea.

Asthma

Take four or six tender leaves of *btaches* (Alexandrian laurel), crush them and put them in a cup of water. Give the water to the sick person.

Diarrhea and vomiting

Pick eight or more guava leaves, chew them thoroughly and swallow with water. Or pick between four and eight leaves of *ngesil* (the red stems), wash them and chew and swallow with water.

Suches

Pick four tender leaves from *riaml* and chew them and swallow with water.

Ointment for boil

Gather five *kelel a malk* plant. Crush them and place in a small pot with coconut oil and boil. After it is cooled, use it on the boil.

Remedy for worms (in the stomach)

Get a ripe papaya, cut it open and eat it including the seeds.

Corneal scar

Pick one or two *uburk* weed (arnatto plant; *Bixa orellana* L.), wash them clean and set aside a short stem, crush the weed well and squeeze the sap onto the eye. Carefully use the stem to poke the affected part of the eye. Another remedy is the young tender leaves of *butcherchar*. Take one or two leaves, chew them very well, get a section of branch from the same plant and use it as a straw to carefully blow the odor onto the eye. Care must be taken so that no piece of the leaves gets into the eye.

Head ache

Get four tender young leaves of lemon tree (*debechel*), *chiuetekill* (a type of vine), *beraber* (weed found in swampy areas), and *chebeludes*. Wash them clean, then go to a stream and put all the leaves in your mouth, chew them and put your head under the running stream water and swallow all of the quid with water from the stream. The combination of these leaves will give out a very strong odor, and that is the reason we have to submerge our head in the water, then chew them and swallow water.

Other medicinal herbs and plants

Kollil (Acanthus ebracteatus Vahl.) (to be pounded) - remedy for gonorrhea. Get a handful of the tender young leaves and a couple of fruits, pound them together well and wrap them in a piece of cloth. Put the bundle in a pot with water, bring to a boil, let it stand to cool off, and drink the water.

Bngei - remedy for an open wound. Collect a handful of young tender leaves, pound them well, wrap them in a piece cloth, put it in a pot with water, and boil it. Use the warm water to wash the wound, and squeeze the wrapped leaves so the juice from the leaves settles on the wound.

Ngolem - Gather *ngolem*, one-half of a brown coconut, *ngel* leaves, some leaves from *ongael* and find a fist sized rock from the river bed. Grate the half coconut, chop the leaves from *ngel* and *ngolem*, and heat the rock on a hot bed of charcoal. Mix the chopped leaves with the coconut and put the mixture on a piece of cloth. Put one piece of *ongael* leaf on top of the mixture and put the heated stone on top of the *ongael* leaf. Put another *ongael* leaf on the rock, tie the cloth, and use this to massage aching muscles, sprained joints and other aching body parts.

Btaches (true kamani) - Young tender leaves of *btaches* can be used as a remedy for asthma. Collect the young leaves and break them up into small pieces. Put them in a cup of water. The white sap of the leaves will turn the water milky. Give this to the sick person to drink.

Post-partum remedy - Gather *cherur* leaves (tree in evening primrose family; *L. hyssopifolia* or *L. octovalvis*), *ulekelakel* leaves (snapdragon; *Limnophila fragrans*), *ului*, *chebeludes*, *susiuch*, flower of *kerdeu* (ixora plant), four fruits of *kerdeu*, young tender leaves of the lime tree (*malechuanged*) and *ukellel a chedib* (*P. palauensis* Hos.). Collect a handful of the aforementioned plants, bring them to the house and every morning put together a few from each ingredient into a handful and give it to a new mother who has just finished her hot bath. She should take them to the river for her bath to chew and swallow while her head is submerged in the river. She should also drink the river water with the medicine. This medicine cures the internal parts of the new mother after birth and the hot bath.

Cherasch el tuu (a variety of bananas) - Take one small shoot, pound the small banana stock, and put the mash on a piece of cloth. Tie it and squeeze the juice into a container, and give to someone who has gonorrhea or a woman who has diarrhea. The juice from this plant is reddish almost like blood.

Earache - Get four each of the flower of *cherecherroi* (*Mussaenda sericeae* Bl.), and young tender leaves from a lemon tree, pound them together, wrap in a piece of cloth, and add some coconut oil. Squeeze a drop into the aching ear.

Kemaiirs (a type of weed) - Get a handful of young leaves from the weed that have not opened yet, pick seven tips of *baklild* (scleria), seven leaves of *ongael*, seven young leaves of *ngel* and seven green young fruits of *ngel*. Put these together and pound them well. Wrap everything in a piece of cloth. Put in a pot with water and boil for a few minutes to release the essences. This is a remedy for women who sleep with their husbands too soon after birth so that they become dizzy or experience a whirling sensation.

Chermall (*hibiscus*) - Collect a handful of young tender leaves and pound them well. Squeeze them into water and give it to a woman who is experiencing difficulty in childbirth.

Betel leaf - Take the tip of a leaf from a young betel nut plant, gather a handful each of *kukiut* (*techellel a chul*) (*Cassytha filiformis* L.; giant dodder) *chelodechoel* (*Trema cannabina* var. *scabra*), and *kertaku* (*Decaspermum fruticosum* Forst.). Put all these together and wrap them in the betel nut leaf. Tie the leaf tight and put it in a pot of water to boil. While it is hot cover yourself with a blanket or other bedding and steam yourself. Remedy for dengue fever or the common cold.

Kelel a malk (*H. biflora* (L.) Lam.) - Take one or two weeds. Smash them well, add coconut oil, and squeeze into the ear to cure earache. Very good to use on someone who popped his ear while diving.

Olumud - Gather the large leaves from the female plant, nine fruits of *ngel* (Indian mulberry) and *kelel a malk*. Pound all of these together and make them into small balls. Put one into your mouth and swallow it with water. This is medicine for aching joints.

Chosm - Collect eight leaves of *chosm* that have turned yellow. Put them in a pot with water, bring the mixture to a boil and drink the water. This is a remedy for diarrhea.

Rebotel - Collect sixteen leaves of *rebotel* (Palauan wild apple or wax apple) put them in a pot with water and bring to a boil. Let it cool off and drink the water like you drink tea when you are thirsty. This is a remedy for rheumatism.

Dub (*Callicarpa erioclona* Shaw) - Collect a few leaves from the *dub* bush, pound them and put the resulting mash on a fish sting. This is a remedy for any kind of fish sting.

Ongael - Another remedy for fish sting is the leaf of *ongael* plant. Collect a few leaves, pound them well and put the resulting paste on a fish sting. This helps on all kinds of fish stings.

Ngel - This is a remedy for constipation. Get a section of root from the *ngel* tree. Collect some leaves and a few fruits from the same plant. Wash the root well, put it together with the leaves and fruits in a pot. Add water and boil to release the essences. Drink the brew.

Remedy for bad sinus - Collect two young tender leaves of *chebechab* (scented fern), two young leaves of *tochedulik* (cat's claw) and two young leaves of *kertaku*. Put these together and go to a stream, immerse yourself in the stream and put the medicine in your mouth. Chew while immersing your head in the stream and swallow the leaves with water.

Titimel - This is a remedy for pink eyes. Pick some young leaves of *titimel* and crush them together in your hand and squeeze the juice into the eyes. Another method is to get the leaves and boil them in water, then let the pot stand until the water is lukewarm. Use the water to wash the eyes.

Rakt Bladek

There are other ailments associated with the spirit world called *rakt bladek*. Sometimes people who got sick could not get well with the available medicine. This was because the person aggravated or irritated an elder of the

clan and the spirits became unhappy and caused the illness. The only way to cure the illness was to appease the elder and the spirits of the clan or household. It was incumbent upon the close relatives of the sick person to talk to the elder to ask for forgiveness so that the sick person would recover. It was only through this negotiation and asking of forgiveness and understanding from the elder that the sick would become well again.

Another way a person could get sick is through *omelengesakl* - an act of sorcery. This occurred when a wronged person went to a medium to ask for assistance in finding the person that stole or broke something important to him. The medium would then consult the spirits and the spirits would cause a curse to fall on the culprit. When a person got sick this way he or she would find another who knew or could call on the spirits to find out the cause of the ailment. The sick person would have to make amends to the wronged person so that he could get well.

Yet another way a person could get sick was if a person degraded a spirit or god. In some parts of Palau there was a revered spirit or god that could be a fish or creature, or bird. If someone had a connection to that village or part of it, either through birth, marriage, adoption or other means, he could not harm the animal or the place where the god was said to live. The person could get seriously ill and die if the cause of the illness was not found soon enough. If the cause of the illness was found in time, the relatives of the sick person would have to make amends with food and money, and apologize and beg for forgiveness.

GLOSSARY

- Baklild: scleria; *Scleria* varieties
Berdakl: vine in grape family; *Cayratia trifolia* (L.) Quiz.
Bngei: tree in Panax family; *Polyscias nodosa* (Bl.) Seem.
Bobai: papaya; *Carica papaya* L.
Btaches: Alexandrian laurel, true kamani; *Calophyllum inophyllum* L.
Bubeubedul: ground cherry; *Physalis angulata* L.
Butcherchar: pagoda plant or similar plants in Verbena family; *Clerodendrum paniculatum* (L.) or *Clerodendrum* varieties
Chebechab: scented fern; *Polypodium scolopendria* Burm. f.
Chebeludes: soapberry bush; *Allophyllus timorensis* Bl.
Chedebungel: *Crataeva speciosa* Volk.
Chelodechoel: *Trema cannabina* var. *scabra*
Cherasch el tuu: a variety of bananas
Cherecheroi: *Mussaenda sericeae* Bl.
Chermall: hau (hibiscus); *Hibiscus tiliaceus* L.
Cherur: tree in evening primrose family; *L. hyssopifolia* or *L. octovalvis*
Chosm: tree in Verbena family; *Premna Obtusifolia* R. Br.).
Dub: *Callicarpa erioclona* Shaw
Irang: ylang-ylang; *Cananga odorata* Lam.
Kebui: pepper plant; *Piper betle* L.
Kekul a ius: hanging club moss; *Lycopodium phlegmaria* L.
Kelel a malk: hedyotis; *Hedyotis biflora* (L.) Lam.
Kelsechedui: *Verbenaceae negundo* var. *bicolor* (Willd.) H. J. Lam.
Kerdeu: ixora plant; *Ixora casei* Hance or *Ixora coccinea* L.
Kerul a sokel(besokel): candle bush; *Cassia alata* L.
Kertaku: *Decaspermum fruticosum* Forst.
Keskus: lemon grass; *Cymbopogon citratus* (DC.) Stapf.
Kesuk: croton; *Codiaeum variegatum*
Kilkuld: a type of fern; *Dryopteris arida*
Kollil: *Acanthus ebracteatus* Vahl.
Kukiut (techellel a chul): giant dodder; *Cassytha filiformis* L.
Lab : a bush whose bark was used to make skirts; *Abroma augusta* (L.) L.
Meduu: breadfruit tree; *Artocarpus altilis* (Park.) Fosb.

Malechuanged (Merodel): lime tree; *Citrus aurantifolia* (Christm.) Swingle
 Ngas: Common ironwood; *Causarina equisetifolia* L.
 Ngel: Indian mulberry, bullock heart or similar plant in coffee family; *Morinda* varieties
 Ngesil: wedelia; *Wedelia biflora* (L.) DC.
 Ngolm: glochidion; *Glochidion* varieties
 Ochod: Caroline cinnamon tree; *Cinnamomum carolinense* Koidz.
 Olumud: desmodium; *Desmodium triflorum* (L.) DC.
 Ongael: tree in Akia family; *Phalleria nisidai* Kan.),
 Rebotel: Palauan wild apple or wax apple; *Eugenia javanica* Lam.
 Riaml: football fruit, pangi or payan; *Pangium edule* Reinw.
 Sausab: soursop; *Annona muricata* L.
 Sis: ti plant; *Cordyline fruticosa* (L.) Cher.; *C. terminalis* (L.) Kunth.
 Temikel: coconut leaf ribs
 Titimel: amra tree; *Spondias pinata* (L.F.) Kunz.
 Tochedulik: wait-a-bit; nicker nuts; *Caesalpina bondu* (L.) Roxb.
 Uburk: arnotto dye plant; *Bixa orellana* L.
 Ukellal a chedib: *Phyllanthus palauensis* Hos.
 Ulekelakel: snapdragon; *Limnophila fragrans*



Chebeludes: *Allophyllus timorensis* Bl.



Cherecherói: *Mussaenda sericeae* Bl.



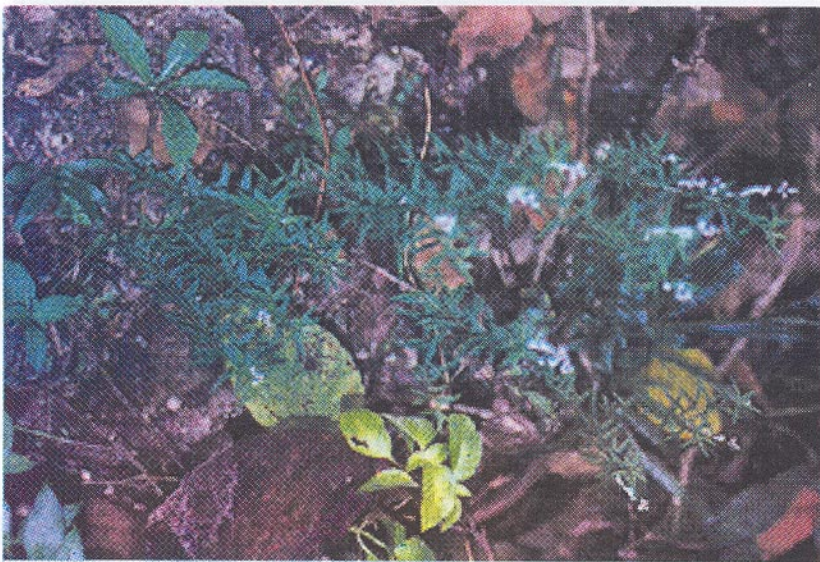
Kollil: *Acanthus ebracteatus* Vahl.



Malechuanged (Merodel): *Citrus aurantifolia* (Christm.) Swingle



Ngel: *Morinda* varieties



Ukellel a chedib: *Phyllanthus palauensis* Hos.