

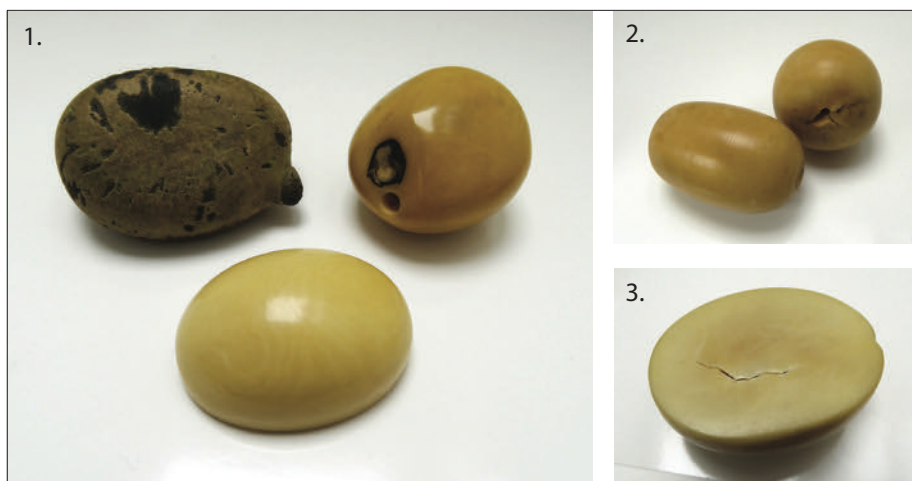


Tagua

Vegetable Ivory from South America



Commercially available vegetable ivory is the hard, white endosperm of the seed of several species of palm trees in the genus *Phytelephas*, so named for its resemblance to elephant tusk ivory. It is sold under various names, including *nut ivory*, *palm ivory*, *corozo*, *jarina*, and *marfim-vegetal*. On a recent trip to Costa Rica, Hanna collected a fresh Tagua nut for the Studio Jewelers teaching collection. The rind (pericarp) is generally removed by animals, and as you can see in the picture at left, this one had been nibbled on. Above R: vintage vegetable ivory dice.



1. Tagua nut with pericarp; polished nut that has been drilled; a Tagua cabochon made from half a nut. 2. Vintage Tagua beads. 3. Nuts can develop cracks as they dry and harden if proper temperature and humidity conditions are not maintained. 4. Vintage vegetable ivory buttons, some dyed to resemble tortoise shell. At one time there were more than 200 button factories in the U.S. making buttons like these. 5. A frog Netsuke carved from a Tagua nut, with areas of natural surface.



Tagua palms are *dioecious (gendered)*, and both male and female trees flower. Above: fruit attached to the *spadixes* on the female, and pod-like *spathes*—large sheaths enclosing the flower cluster—on the male. A big thank you to botanist friend Damon Smith for help with the terminology!

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