

Constructing a Herbarium, Collection and Key to Medicinal and Other Traditional Plants of Samoa

Don Vargo (American Samoa: Professional Development Program Grant)

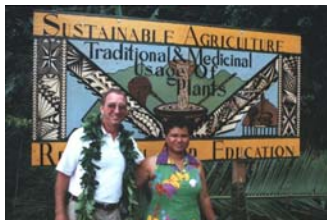
Project Number: EW97-018

Title: Constructing a Herbarium, Collection and Key to Medicinal and Other Traditional Plants of Samoa

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Major Participant: Arthur Whistler, University of Hawaii Ethnobotanist

SARE Grant: \$15,510



Jim and Totoa Currie, both responsible for the project, during the opening ceremony for the Medicinal Garden in July 1999

Situation:

A number of plants native to Samoa have long been used for medicinal and other purposes. To assure that the plants – and knowledge of their traditional uses – are not lost in an age of increased use of modern medicines, this Professional Development Program grants seeks to educate interested individuals about the plants and collect specimens for a variety of uses.



The aromatic fern intrigues staff members

Objectives:

1. Conduct a workshop on the botany of native Samoan plants traditionally used for medicines and other purposes, focusing on the cultural, biological and economic importance of these plants.
2. Establish a herbarium at the American Samoa Community College Land Grants Program with permanent specimens for use in identifying plants with medicinal and other traditional uses.
3. Establish a collection of living specimens of native plants, used for medicinal and other purposes, as a botanical garden at the college Agricultural Experiment Station.
4. Prepare a plant key that includes descriptions, slides and prints of the plants.
5. Prepare a booklet for local use that features the key, descriptions and photographs of the plants.



The herbarium collection is available only to professionals

Actions:

The project coordinators held an eight-day botanical workshop Dec. 2-11, 1997, under the direction of Arthur Whistler, a noted ethnobotanist with the University of Hawaii and an expert in the flora of Polynesia. Whistler, who has broad experience in Samoa, taught 19 participants who attended the full workshop and a handful of others who attended selected sessions.

Two of the participants, from the American Samoa Department of Education, subsequently conducted mini-workshops for teachers in elementary and secondary schools, with the goal of making environmental education more pertinent and interesting to schoolchildren of American Samoa.

Results:

The project resulted in the establishment of a herbarium and botanical garden and the preparation of a guide to Samoan medicinal and traditional plants, a botanical taxonomic key and a guide to the most commonly used medicinal plants of Samoa.

Vargo reports (email Aug. 2, 2007) that the Medicinal Garden continues to be a draw during campus tours by schoolchildren and traditional healers. The healers are allowed to harvest small amounts of needed materials as long as they also contribute to the garden's collection by bringing in plants and explaining their uses.

Because some plants are not well adapted to the conditions at the garden site, the collection will never be all-inclusive. However, at any given time, about 50 species can be found in the garden, each signed by Samoan and botanical names.

The herbarium collection is available to professionals, who may examine mounted specimens in the climate-controlled room housing the collection.



Kava is an important traditional plant of Samoa



The medicinal garden draws schoolchildren and traditional healers

Potential Benefits:

The garden provides a valuable resource on the use of plants for traditional medicine and a source of such plants for island traditional healers, and the herbarium provides a resource for professionals to study plants found in Samoa's rain forest.



A sign alerts visitors to the medicinal garden