

## DIVERSITY OF RUSH AND REED PLANTS USED FOR TRADITIONAL CRAFT INDUSTRY IN SRI LANKA

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Among naturally occurring plants in Sri Lanka, rush and reed plants play a key role in traditional craft industry, in making mats, bins, baskets and other products. The use of various plant parts and natural dyes based on folk wisdom is a part of the heritage of traditional craft industry in Sri Lanka. As a part of a program in conserving natural resources and biodiversity, the nongovernmental organisation, "Gamagedara" or committee for people's right which is involved in activities related to traditional rush and reed craft items in Sri Lanka and working for the community development of the people engaged in traditional rush and reed craft industry, conducted a research program to identify, rush and reed plants used in the traditional craft industry in Sri Lanka. Sixteen plant species which are used as raw materials for different traditional craft items, have been collected from the twenty five administrative districts in the country. These natural plants have being utilized for over thousand years by the local communities who were engaged in traditional craft industry. Collected plants have different common vernacular names especially in two main local languages of Sinhala and Tamil. Rush and reed plants (families of Cyperaceae and Typhaceae respectively) which are used for weaving mats and baskets are commonly named as 'Pan' in Sinhala language and as 'Pan pul' in Tamil language. Collected plants breeding materials are maintained at the centre, 'Gamagedara', Horana, Sri Lanka as an 'ex situ' germplasm collection and characterized for their morphological differences during the period of January 2012 to September 2013 with the help of National Herbarium, Royal Botanic Garden, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. The morphology of rush and reed plants were observed and studied for their variation in height, leaf characters, roots, rhizome, floral structure, tillering and stem structure. A dried specimen of each plant species was made and used for comparing them with herbarium specimens. Out of the sixteen collected plants, fourteen specimens (14) were taxonomically identified comparing them with herbarium specimens at the National Herbarium, Royal Botanic Garden, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Aerial stem or culm of reed/rush plants (eleven species) and leaf stalk (three species) were found to be the raw materials for traditional craft items studied. Fourteen plant species belonged to twelve (12) genera and two families, as *Cyperus corymbosus*, *C. haspan*, *C. alternifolius*, *C. pangorei*, *C. kyllingia*, *Schoenoplectus grossus*, *S. auriculatus*, *Eleocharis dulcis*, *Scleria poaeformis*, *Fimbristylis dichotomy*, *F. triflora*, *Rhynchospora corymbosa*, *Lepironia articulate* and *Typha angustifolia*.

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