

Using Tagua (ivory-nut palm) nuts



Tagua nuts are a fairly well-known substitute for ivory for small carved objects and are quite readily available online. They come from a S/C American palm and these examples are roughly round and about 50mm across, one with a facet sanded in to show the creamy-white and easily-polished interior.

Note that the nuts are seeds and have (?obviously) a spherical hollow in the middle and may have cracks around this. In the 140mm diameter double-bowl above, made of elm, the central nut was first mounted in the lathe chuck and drilled through at 20mm. A close-fitting short wooden rod was then glued in, projecting both ends, and the nut shaped and polished (no applied finish) between centres. The rod was then shortened and glued successively into holes in the base of the bowls, which had pre-shaped outer surfaces but whose interiors were then hollowed out carefully with either the other end of the rod or the first bowl held in the chuck (obviously after each side's glue had fully set). This requires care but worked OK - to minimise stress I supported the middle of the unhollowed face on the tailstock and hollowed out the bowl leaving a 'rod' for the tailstock that was then removed last. The rod extends into the bowl base about 14mm.

Clearly the resulting double bowl is reversible which is quite fun and is here being used to hold tagua nuts...



A slightly less-successful use in a pen - by slicing the nut with a bandsaw and cutting out and drilling sections (one shown below) that are then glued in a stack around a 7mm brass tube. These are then finished together as a pen barrel (in this case I have glued red veneer layers between the nut sections). Defects show but perhaps look 'natural'.

In either case the nut core machines smoothly and easily and is of hardwood-style hardness. The nut can be finished and polished without a coating, although one has been applied to the pen.

Will Stewart
Easter 2017