

# HOME GARDENS IN AMAZONIAN PERU: DIVERSITY AND EXCHANGE OF PLANTING MATERIAL\*

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**ABSTRACT.** This article examines how peasant farmers build and maintain agrobiodiversity in home gardens found in two traditional peasant communities along the Marañón River in the Peruvian Amazon. Data were gathered through household and garden surveys as well as in-depth interviews with garden tenders in an upland mixed agricultural village and a lowland fishing village. Substantial variations in cultivated plant diversity were encountered in gardens between and within the villages, which are found to be related to differential exchange of seeds, cuttings, suckers, and other planting material as well as to specific garden and household characteristics. Planting material flows along multiple pathways—from gift giving and purchase to inheritance and scavenging—to the gardens, reflecting a complex and often extensive network of exchange that enables the establishment and maintenance of home garden plant diversity in seemingly isolated and small communities. Further research is needed to identify broader geographical and sociocultural patterns of agrobiodiversity in Amazonia.

*Keywords:* Amazonia, exchange networks, home gardens, Peru, planting material.

Home gardens—also known as “backyard gardens,” “dooryard gardens,” and “house gardens”—are characterized by highly diverse cultivated plants (Kumar and Nair 2004) and are regarded as sustainable agricultural production systems for the humid tropics (Kehlenbeck and Maass 2005). Over the past few decades home garden research has emphasized the description and inventorying of the diversity and multiple uses of plant species (Kumar and Nair 2004) and the promotion of home gardening for nutritional and other welfare benefits for the rural poor (Trinh and others 2003). Whereas earlier studies hailed home gardens for their agrobiodiversity (Landauer and Brazil 1990; Jose and Shanmugaratnam 1993; Kumar, Suman, and Chinnamani 1994; Smith 1996), more recent studies have sought to reveal patterns of diversity within and among rural tropical communities (Salick, Cellinese, and Knapp 1997; Wezel and Bender 2003; Coomes and Ban 2004; Kehlenbeck and Maass 2005). Agrobiodiversity is defined as “the diversity of useful plants in managed ecosystems” (Brookfield 2001, 40).

One reason for the increasing interest in home gardens is the global decline of cultivated plant diversity in tropical agricultural systems (Kumar and Nair 2004). David Cleveland, Daniela Soleri, and Steven Smith (1994) hypothesized that the

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