



## Tropical House

The display pod is designed to act as a stimulus for discussion about some of the plants to be found in this **hot** and **humid** climate zone. These are some background notes to the plants used in the pod, which may help teachers and group leaders in their interpretation of this glasshouse to their pupils.



### **Sugar cane**

*Saccharum officinarum*



A type of grass that can reach 6m in height. Sucrose is contained in the sap and it is from this that sugar is extracted by evaporating the water. Brazil is currently the biggest Sugar Cane producing country and it is still grown widely through the Caribbean, where it was first brought by Christopher Columbus in his voyage to the Americas. It is harvested either mechanically or by hand, firstly set on fire to burn away dead leaves and kill venomous snakes!



### **Rubber**

*Hevea brasiliensis*



Once the tree is 5 or 6 years old it can be cut for its sap-like extract known as latex - look for the cut marks on the stem. This is thought to be a defence against insect predators for the tree. The Aztecs used to paint rubber on their feet just like wellies! On the London Underground, natural rubber is still used for the train tyres and escalator handrails.

### Key to symbols





## **Banana**

*Musa x paradisiaca*



This is the number one fruit bought in British supermarkets. The name 'banan' is Arabic for finger and defying gravity, the fruit grow upwards. This is not a tree as if you look carefully at the stem it is actually made up of old leaves. They are grown in many different countries and are exported whilst they are green, being gassed with ethylene to ripen them.



## **Coffee**

*Coffea arabica*



The roasted seeds, commonly called coffee beans, are used to make a hot drink which is widely consumed around the world. It produces clusters of fragrant white flowers followed by oval fruit which are green, ripening over several months to yellow, then red, becoming black on drying. Each berry usually contains two seeds, but a small number have only one and these are called 'peaberries'.



## **Chocolate**

*Theobroma cacao*



Theobroma is Greek for 'food of the gods' and indeed back in Aztec and Mayan times, this plant was offered to their gods. Each pod contains around 20 to 60 seeds, usually called beans, which are surrounded in a white pulp. Each seed contains a high amount (around 50%) of fat called cocoa butter. It takes about 500 cocoa beans to make 1kg of chocolate. The tree begins to bear fruit when it is about four or five years old.