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RITUALISTIC USE OF PLANTS IN QUILOMBOLA COMMUNITIES IN MATO GROSSO: A BIBLIOGRAPHIC REVIEW

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Ritualistic Use of Plants in Quilombola Communities in Mato Grosso: A Bibliographic Review

ABSTRACT

Ethnobotany is a branch of the biological sciences dedicated to studying the relationships between human populations and the plant world, encompassing the use of plants for food, medicine,

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construction, and symbolic purposes. Among symbolic uses, ritualistic application stands out, as plants play crucial roles in the religious, spiritual, and cultural practices of traditional peoples. Quilombola communities—traditional groups descended from enslaved Africans—preserve a rich heritage of practices and knowledge regarding the use of plants in rituals of healing, protection, faith, and cultural identity, representing a significant segment of Brazil's traditional peoples and communities. In the state of Mato Grosso, various Quilombola communities have demonstrated resilience over the centuries; they remain active and vibrant, upholding a rich culture that includes the performance of diverse rituals. Studying ritual plants is essential to understanding these peoples' relationship with their environment and the preservation of their traditional knowledge. This study aims to compile and analyze research on the ritualistic use of plants by Quilombola communities in Mato Grosso through a literature review. The research identified 73 species of ritual plants, characterized by diverse spiritual properties and methods of use.

Keywords: Quilombolas; Rituals; Religion; Mato Grosso; Ethnobotany.

Uso ritual de plantas en las comunidades quilombolas de Mato Grosso: una revisión bibliográfica.

RESUMEN

La etnobotánica es una rama de las ciencias biológicas que estudia las relaciones entre las poblaciones humanas y el mundo vegetal, incluyendo los usos alimenticios, medicinales, constructivos y simbólicos de las plantas. Entre los usos simbólicos, destaca el ritualístico, en el que las plantas desempeñan un papel crucial en las prácticas religiosas, espirituales y culturales de los pueblos tradicionales. Las comunidades quilombolas, como grupos tradicionales formados por descendientes de africanos esclavizados, conservan un rico patrimonio de prácticas y conocimientos asociados al uso de plantas en rituales de sanción, protección, fe e identidad cultural, representando un segmento importante de los pueblos y comunidades tradicionales de Brasil. En el estado de Mato Grosso, donde varias comunidades quilombolas han resistido a lo largo de los siglos, permanecen vivas y activas, preservando una rica cultura que incluye la realización de diferentes formas de rituales. El estudio de las plantas rituales es fundamental para comprender la relación de estos pueblos con el medio ambiente y la preservación de su conocimiento tradicional. Este trabajo busca recopilar y analizar investigaciones sobre el uso ritualístico de las plantas por parte de las comunidades quilombolas en Mato Grosso a través de una revisión bibliográfica. La investigación ha descubierto 73 especies de plantas rituales con diversas propiedades y usos espirituales.

Palabras-clave: Comunidades quilombolas; Rituales; Religión; Mato Grosso; Etnobotánica.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnobotany is an interdisciplinary field that integrates knowledge from the biological and social sciences and focuses on the study of relationships between human societies and the plant world, investigating their medicinal, food, and symbolic uses (OLIVEIRA et al., 2009). Regarding symbolic uses, ritual use is particularly noteworthy, as plant species may assume roles that transcend their material dimension and become embedded in the spiritual world (TAQUES, 2023). In this context, plants can be understood as mediators between the physical and sacred realms, participating in healing, protection, and purification rituals. Brazilian quilombola communities represent important guardians of memory, culture, and traditional

knowledge routes in African heritage, transmitted orally across generations. These groups, originally formed by escaped enslaved Africans and their descendants who also resisted the slave system, represent forms of sociocultural resistance and the preservation of ancestral practices (CARVALHO & COSTA, 2013). Their history of formation is directly associated with the struggle for freedom, the establishment of autonomous territories, and the development of their own ways of life, deeply connected to nature (FIABANI, 2007).

In Mato Grosso, the presence of quilombola communities dates back to the colonial period, when mineral exploitation and agricultural production drove the forced arrival of enslaved Africans. Despite adverse conditions, these groups developed forms of resistance, organizing themselves into autonomous communities and transmitting orally knowledge, beliefs, and practices related to the use of plants (SYMANSKI, 2007).

Several quilombola communities remain active in the state today, maintaining traditions, knowledge, and practices inherited from their ancestors despite ongoing challenges (COSTA & SILVA, 2020). The ritual use of plants in these communities, where religious practices with Catholic and African roots predominate, constitutes an important cultural and religious element. These practices have contributed to the preservation of African cultural elements over time by functioning as instruments of resistance. Plants used in rituals, such as fumigation and *benzeções* (traditional healing blessings), may serve multiple purposes, including medicinal, aromatic, and symbolic functions. Their preparation varies considerably and is almost always associated with mythical narratives, ancestral histories, and principles of reciprocity with nature (OLIVEIRA et al., 2024).

Ethnobotany plays a fundamental role in recording, analyzing, and documenting knowledge transmitted over centuries, contributing to its appreciation and preservation while expanding the understanding of human–plant interactions within specific cultural contexts. The study of these practices is relevant not only to understanding the quilombola culture of Mato Grosso but also to valuing and preserving traditional knowledge, which is often threatened by modernization, rural outmigration, and biodiversity loss. Therefore, this study aims to compile and analyze research on the ritual use of plants by quilombola communities in Mato Grosso through a bibliographic review of widely recognized and reliable online journals, in order to understand the cultural and symbolic dimensions of these practices in Mato Grosso.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was designed as a qualitative, exploratory literature review qualitative, exploratory research based on a literature review of existing articles, books, and publications, allowing for an in-depth examination of the topic and the incorporation of different perspectives. The study followed the following stages: selection of the topic, online search for materials related to the topic, analysis of the retrieved materials, screening of the studies, and analysis of the results presented in the selected studies.

This literature review included selected review and original research articles, published in Portuguese and English, addressing the use of plant species for ritual purposes. The literature search was conducted in the Google Scholar, Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), Web of Science, ResearchGate, and Research Rabbit databases and academic research platforms, using the following search terms and Boolean operators: ethnobotany OR plant OR medicinal plants OR ritual medicinal plants OR quilombola communities OR Mato Grosso biomes OR Mato Grosso. The search was limited to the period from 2000 to 2025.

The following inclusion criteria were adopted: review and original research articles available in full text and published in scientific journals with an editorial board and an ISSN

and/or DOI. The exclusion criteria comprised duplicate or incomplete articles, studies published outside the predefined period, and works classified as gray literature.

The botanical names, synonyms, and botanical families of the plants were verified using the TROPICOS platform of the Missouri Botanical Garden (MO, USA) and Re flora Online. The search identified eight articles that met the inclusion criteria. After duplicate records were removed and the eligible studies were fully reviewed, 73 medicinal plant species used for ritual purposes were identified. A literature review based on bibliographic research surveys the published literature related to the topic under study and relies on secondary sources of information, such as scientific articles, conference proceedings, and other publications (MARCONI; LAKATOS, 2017).

Ethically, this research was conducted under the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Mato Grosso (CEP-UFMT), Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Appreciation (CAAE) No. 78947824.2.0000.8124, Opinion No. 7,160,593, issued in 2024. After a full reading of the remaining articles, the plants used in rituals by quilombola communities in Mato Grosso were organized in a spreadsheet containing the vernacular name, scientific name, botanical family, main form of use, Orixás or spiritual guides (when reported), and medicinal properties.

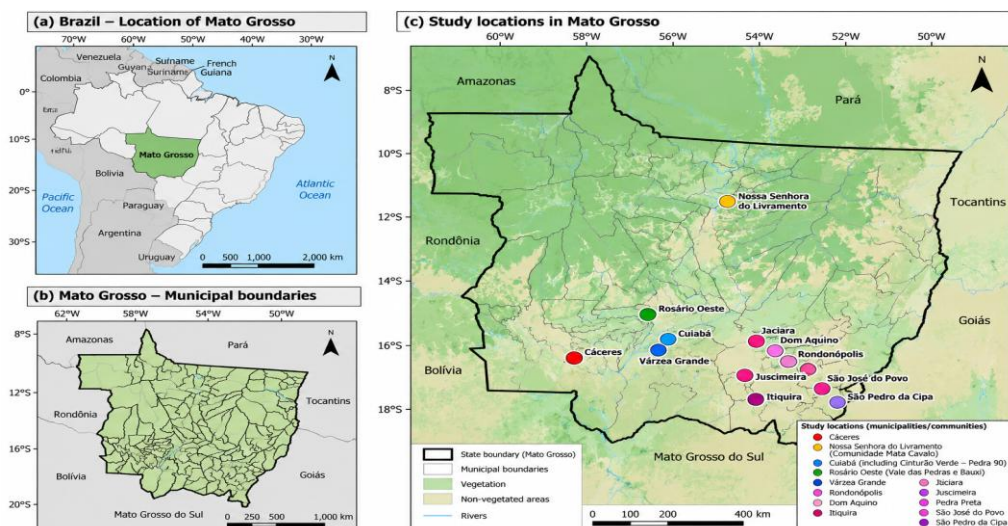
Subsequently, the most frequently cited families and species were identified for more detailed analysis and to guide the discussion around the following analytical question: “How do different quilombola communities in Mato Grosso use plants in their religious rituals, and which species have greater symbolic and spiritual relevance in these contexts?” This approach allowed for an anthropological and ethnobotanical perspective on the spirituality associated with these practices, while providing a respectful exploration of the symbolic meanings attributed to selected plant species.

Geographical scope of the reviewed studies

The articles in which plant species with spiritual properties used in rituals were identified originated from the following municipalities and communities in the state of Mato Grosso, as shown in Figures 1 and 2: Cáceres (Pereira, 2024); Mata Cavalo Community, in Nossa Senhora do Livramento (Pasa, 2015; Ferreira, Batista, & Pasa, 2015; Dalla & Costa, 2024); Cuiabá (Klein, 2022); and the Cinturão Verde Community, in the Pedra 90 district of Cuiabá (Oliveira, 2010).

Two articles included multiple study locations. One covered the municipalities of Rondonópolis, Dom Aquino, Itiquira, Jaciara, Juscimeira, Pedra Preta, São José do Povo, and São Pedro da Cipa (David & Pasa, 2017). The other included Passagem da Conceição, in Várzea Grande; Vale das Pedras and Bauxi communities, in Rosário Oeste; and Carne Seca, in Cáceres (Lezan, 2024). Figure 1 highlights the municipalities in Mato Grosso where ethnobotanical studies addressing ritual plants were conducted.

Figure 1. Map of Mato Grosso highlighting the municipalities where the reviewed studies were conducted.



Source: Authors' elaboration based on IBGE (2026) cartographic databases.

Figure 2. Geographic distribution of the studies on ritual plant use by quilombola communities in Mato Grosso, Brazil. Different colors represent the studies included in the literature review.

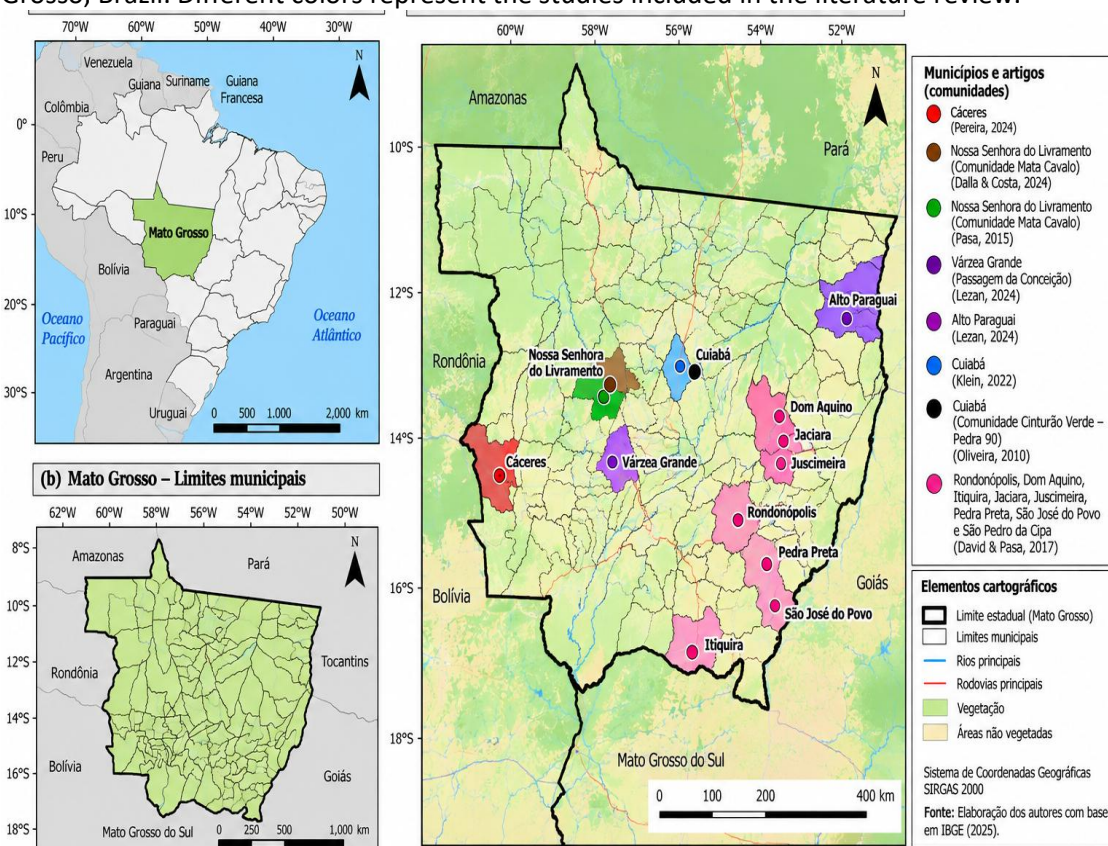


Figura 2 – Os municípios mato-grossenses que tiveram pesquisas registradas.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on IBGE (2026) cartographic databases.

The points on the map are differentiated by color, with each color representing a specific article. The red point corresponds to Pereira's study in Cáceres, whereas the brown point represents the study by Dalla and Costa in the Mata Cavalo Community, in Nossa Senhora do Livramento. The green point represents Pasa's study, also conducted in Nossa Senhora do Livramento. The purple points represent Lezan's study in Alto Paraguai and Várzea Grande. The black and blue points represent, respectively, the studies by Oliveira and Klein in Cuiabá. Finally, the pink markers correspond to the study by David and Pasa.

RESULTS

Analysis of the selected studies identified 73 medicinal plant species used for ritual purposes, employed in different types of rituals and associated with particular Orixás and spiritual guides. These species exhibited diverse properties and were distributed across 33 botanical families, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Plants used in rituals by quilombola communities in Mato Grosso.

Family	Vernacular name	Scientific name	Form of use	Orixás and spiritual guides	Reported medicinal and spiritual properties
ACHANTHACEAE	Quebra demanda/Abre caminho	<i>Justicia gendarusa</i> Burm. f.	Ritual bath	Ogum, Iansã	Encouragement, vitality
	Camarão	<i>Pachystachys lutea</i> Ness.	Ritual bath, amulet	DNA	Energy, focus
AMARANTHACEAE	Terramicina	<i>Alternanthera brasiliiana</i> (L.) Kuntze	Ritual bath	DNA	Health
	Erva-de-Santa-Maria	<i>Dysphania ambrosioides</i> (L.) Mosykin & Clemants	Fumigation	DNA	Energy cleansing
AMARYLLIDACEAE	Alho	<i>Allium sativum</i> L.	Ritual, fumigation	DNA	Mystical and religious; protection against evil spirits; phlegm; cough
ANACARDIACEAE	Aroeira	<i>Myracrodruon urundeuva</i> (M. Allemão) Engl.	Ritual, ritual bath	Iansã, Ogum	Mystical and religious; anti-inflammatory; for dysentery and fever

Family	Vernacular name	Scientific name	Form of use	Orixás and spiritual guides	Reported medicinal and spiritual properties
ARACEAE	Comigo-ninguém-pode	<i>Dieffenbachia picta</i> Hort. ex Gentil	Amulet, ritual, ritual bath	Exu, Ogum	Protection against the evil eye and envy
	Jiboia	<i>Epipremnum aureum</i> (Linden & André) G.S. Bunting	Amulet, ritual, ritual bath	Oxumaré	Renewal
	Samambaia-Africana	<i>Zamioculcas zamiifolia</i> (G. Lodd.) Engl.	DNA	DNA	Mystical and religious
ARALIACEAE	Árvore-da-felicidade/Jurema	<i>Polyscias guilfoylei</i> (W. Bull) L.H. Bailey	Ritual bath, amulet, fumigation	DNA	Evil eye; mystical and religious
	Árvore-da-fortuna/Jurema/Jureminha	<i>Polyscias fruticosa</i> (L.) Harms	Ritual bath, amulet, ritual installation	DNA	Happiness, prosperity, mystical and religious
ARECACEAE	Coqueiro	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L.	Offering and ritual	Iansã and Oxalá	Leaves represent Yansã, and fruits represent Oxalá
	Dendezeiro	<i>Elaeis guineensis</i> Jacq.	Offering	Exu	DNA
	Palha-da-costa	<i>Raphia taedigera</i> (Mart.) Mart.	Ritual installation amulet	Omolu	Protection
ASPARAGACEAE	Peregum-roxo	<i>Cordyline fruticosa</i> (L.) A. Chev.	Ritual bath, ritual, amulet	Omolu, Obaluaye, Nanã	Spiritual cleansing
	Lança-de-Ogum	<i>Sansevieria cylindrica</i> Bojer	Amulet, ritual bath	Ogum	Protection
	Espada-de-Iansã	<i>Sansevieria</i> sp.	Ritual bath	DNA	Spiritual cleansing, protection
	Espada-de-Ogum	<i>Sansevieria</i> sp.	Ritual bath	DNA	Spiritual cleansing, protection
	Espada-de-São-Jorge	<i>Sansevieria trifasciata</i> Prain	Amulet, ritual bath	Ogum	Cleansing of negative energies
ASPHODELACEAE	Babosa	<i>Aloe vera</i> (L.) Burm. f.	DNA	DNA	Heart problems, calming
ASTERACEAE	Assa-peixe	<i>Vernonia polyanthes</i> (Spreng.) Less.	DNA	DNA	Flu, cough
BIXACEAE	Algodãozinho	<i>Cochlospermum</i> cf. <i>vitifolium</i>	DNA	DNA	Mystical and religious

Family	Vernacular name	Scientific name	Form of use	Orixás and spiritual guides	Reported medicinal and spiritual properties
CRASSULACEAE	Saião	<i>Kalanchoe crenata</i> (Andrews) Haw.	Amulet, ritual bath	Yemanjá, Oxum	Prosperity, fertility, anti-inflammatory
	Folha-da-fortuna	<i>Kalanchoe pinnata</i> (Lam.) Pers.	Amulet, ritual bath	DNA	Prosperity
	Fortuna	<i>Bryophyllum pinnatum</i> (Lam.) Oken	Ritual bath	Oxalá, Yemanjá, Xangô	Personal protection, respiratory diseases, insect bites
CUCURBITACEAE	Melão	<i>Cucumis melo</i> L.	Offering	Ogum	DNA
	Melão-de-São-Caetano	<i>Momordica charantia</i> L.	Ritual installation	DNA	Mystical and religious
DRYOPTERIDACEAE	Samambaia-pedreira	<i>Rumohra adiantiformis</i> (G. Forst.) Ching.	DNA	DNA	Mystical and religious
EUPHORBIACEAE	Saboguinho	<i>Acalypha alopecuroides</i> Jacq.	DNA	DNA	Mystical and religious
	Mamona	<i>Ricinus communis</i> L.	Ritual	DNA	Mystical and religious
	Pinhão-roxo	<i>Jatropha gossypifolia</i> L.	Ritual	DNA	Mystical and religious
FABACEAE	Feijão	<i>Phaseolus vulgaris</i> L.	Offering	Preto-velho	DNA
	Jatobá	<i>Hymenaea courbaril</i> L.	DNA	DNA	Mystical and religious
	Jurema	<i>Mimosa tenuiflora</i> (Willd.) Poir.	Ritual	DNA	Personal protection, mystical and religious
LAMIACEAE	Lavanda	<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i> Mill.	Fumigation ritual bath	DNA	Energy cleansing, antiseptic, brain stimulant, for dysentery
	*Alfazema	<i>Lavandula latifolia</i> Medik.	Fumigation ritual bath	DNA	Energy cleansing
	Manjerição	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i> L.	Ritual bath fumigation	Oxalá, Oxossi, Oxum	Energy balance, headache, mediumship
	Hortelã	<i>Mentha × villosa</i> Huds.	Ritual bath	Caboclo, Preto-velho	Calming, anti-flu
	Boldo	<i>Plectranthus barbatus</i> Andrews	Ritual bath	Oxalá	Spiritual cleansing, calming

Family	Vernacular name	Scientific name	Form of use	Orixás and spiritual guides	Reported medicinal and spiritual properties
LAURACEAE	Poejo	<i>Mentha pulegium</i> L.	Ritual	DNA	Mystical and religious
	Patchouli	<i>Pogostemon cablin</i> (Blanco) Benth.	Fumigation	DNA	Cleansing
	Alecrim	<i>Salvia rosmarinus</i> Spenn.	Ritual bath, amulet, fumigation	Oxossi, Yansã, Erês	Energy cleansing
	Mirra	<i>Tetradenia riparia</i> (Hochst.) Codd	Ritual bath, fumigation	Oxalá, Ogum	Analgesic, balance and protection
	Louro	<i>Laurus nobilis</i> L.	Fumigation, ritual bath, offering	Yansã, Ossain	Energy cleansing, digestive
	Abacate	<i>Persea americana</i> Miller	Ritual bath, fumigation	Oxossi, Yemanjá, Caboclos	Balance
LYTHACEAE	Mangava-brava	<i>Lafoensia pacari</i> A.St.-Hil.	DNA	DNA	Mystical and religious
MALPIGHIACEAE	Nó-de-cachorro	<i>Heteropteris aphrodisiaca</i> O. Mach.	DNA	DNA	Stimulant, aphrodisiac, blood purifier
MALVACEAE	Quiabo	<i>Abelmoschus esculentus</i> (L.) Moench	Offering	Exu, Xangô	DNA
	Algodão	<i>Gossypium herbaceum</i> L.	DNA	DNA	Mystical and religious
MUSACEAE	Bananeira	<i>Musa paradisiaca</i> L.	Ritual	DNA	Mystical and religious
MYRISTICACEAE	Noz-moscada	<i>Myristica fragrans</i> Houtt.	Ritual bath, ritual	DNA	Mystical and religious
PASSIFLORACEAE	Maracujá	<i>Passiflora edulis</i> Sims	Offering, ritual bath	Yansã	Guidance, movement, calming
PETIVERIACEAE	Guiné	<i>Petiveria alliacea</i> L.	Ritual bath, fumigation	Omolu, Ogum, Oxossi	Spiritual cleansing, diuretic, abortive, for fever
PHYLLANTHACEAE	Quebra-pedra	<i>Phyllanthus niruri</i> L.	DNA	DNA	Mystical and religious, diuretic
POACEAE	Bambu	<i>Bambusa</i> sp.	Amulet, ritual bath	Yansã	Spiritual cleansing, diuretic, hypotensive
	Cana-de-açúcar	<i>Saccharum officinarum</i> L.	Offering	Exu	DNA
	Capim-cidreira	<i>Cymbopogon citratus</i> (DC.) Stapf.	DNA	DNA	Mystical and religious

Family	Vernacular name	Scientific name	Form of use	Orixás and spiritual guides	Reported medicinal and spiritual properties
POLYPODIACEAE	Milho	<i>Zea mays</i> L.	Offering, ritual, ritual bath, ritual installation	Exu, Oxalá, Omolu	DNA
	Samambaia	<i>Nephrolepis cordifolia</i> (L.) C. Presl	Amulet, ritual bath	Oxassi, Caboclos	Purifies the environment
	Samambaia-de-metro	<i>Goniophlebium persicifolium</i> (Desv.) Bedd.	DNA	DNA	Mystical and religious
ROSACEAE	Ameixa	<i>Prunus domestica</i> L.	Offering	Yemanjá, Oxum	DNA
	Rosa vermelha	<i>Rosa</i> sp.	Ritual bath fumigation, offering	DNA	Brings love
	Rosa laranja/amarela	<i>Rosa</i> sp.	Ritual bath fumigation, offering	DNA	Brings energy
	Rosa branca	<i>Rosa</i> × <i>alba</i>	Ritual bath fumigation, offering	DNA	Brings calm, purity, and peace to the heart
RUTACEAE	Limão-Tahiti	<i>Citrus</i> × <i>latifolia</i>	Ritual bath	Exu	Cleanses negative energies, spiritual cleansing
	Arruda	<i>Ruta graveolens</i> L.	Ritual bath amulet, traditional healing blessing, fumigation, ritual	Oxóssi	Spiritual cleansing, brings energy, abortive
SOLANACEAE	Pimenta	<i>Capsicum frutescens</i> L.	Offering, ritual bath, amulet	Exu	Protection against the evil eye
	Tabaco	<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i> L.	Ritual bath, ritual	Exu, Preto-velho, Boiadeiro	Spiritual cleansing, cleansing
VERBENACEAE	Gervão	<i>Stachytarpheta cayennensis</i> (Rich.) Vahl	Ritual bath	Oxóssi	Digestive problems, flu
VITACEAE	Alfazema-do-campo	<i>Vitex agnus-castus</i> L.	Ritual bath fumigation	DNA	Cleansing
	Uva-verde	<i>Vitis</i> sp.	Offering	Oxalá	DNA

Family	Vernacular name	Scientific name	Form of use	Orixás and spiritual guides	Reported medicinal and spiritual properties
	Uva	<i>Vitis</i> sp.	Offering	Exu, Preto-velho, Caboclo	DNA

Legenda: *DNA: Dados não encontrados;

Fonte: Acervo dos autores (2025).

Botanical and ethnobotanical data show that Lamiaceae is the family with the highest number of cited species—with nine records—followed by Asparagaceae (six species), and Poaceae and Rosaceae (four species each). Araceae, Arecaceae, Fabaceae, and Vitaceae are represented by three species each, while the remaining families are represented by one or two species. Regarding the modes of use for ritual plants, ritual baths are the most frequently reported method (Table 2). Amulets constitute the second most cited form of use; most are blessed and used to protect the environment, though they may also serve ornamental purposes.

Lamiaceae is one of the major families in the Cerrado, comprising species that are generally subshrubs or shrubs, with 30 genera and 240 species present. *Alfazema* (*Lavandula latifolia*) is a variety of lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*); the only difference lies in leaf width, with the name *latifolia* referring to the broad leaves of this species (SOUZA et al., 2018).

The third most frequently reported use is fumigation, which involves burning certain herbs or pieces of wood for energetic cleansing (TAQUES, 2023). This is followed by their use in unspecified rituals, such as offerings or *Ebó*, as well as in ritual installations (or *ibá*), in which a bond is established between the Orixás and people (MARQUES, 2018). Finally, the plants are used by traditional healers known as *benzedeiros* in a process referred to as *benzedura*.

Table 2. Number of times each form of use was reported during the study.

Form of use	Number of times reported
Ritual bath	56
Amulet	27
Fumigation	25
Ritual	21
Offering	19
Ritual installation	4
Traditional healing blessing	1

Source: Authors' records (2025).

DISCUSSION

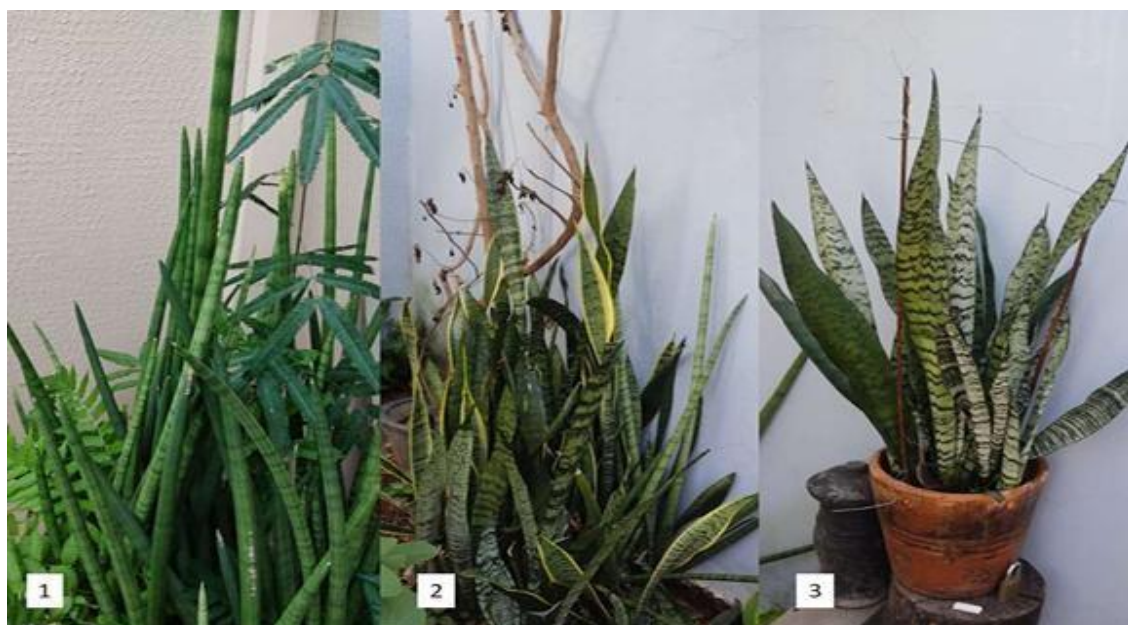
Lamiaceae was the family with the highest number of citations (nine), comprising lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*), alfazema (*Lavandula latifolia*), basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), boldo (*Plectranthus barbatus*), mint (*Mentha × villosa*), pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*), patchouli (*Pogostemon cablin*), rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*), and myrrh (*Tetradenia riparia*).

The Lamiaceae family, belonging to the order Lamiales, comprises approximately 200 genera and 3,200 species and is known for including numerous species with medicinal properties. Many of its species contain essential oils with diverse applications; for example, mint exhibits insecticidal activity (URITU et al., 2018; LIMA & CARDOSO, 2007). In addition, these plants also have mystical and religious uses. With the exception of patchouli and pennyroyal, all of the species listed above share the use of their leaves in ritual baths.

Lavender and alfazema are known for their calming properties and are used in the development and preparation of mediums and for cleansing *terreiros* (FERREIRA, 2017). The same author also discusses the use of rosemary, one of the plants with one of the longest-known histories of use, which has balancing and calming functions and can be combined with other herbs. It is also used to drive away evil spirits. Another well-known species in this family is mint, which is used in ritual baths and, after drying, in fumigation. It is believed to strengthen the spirit and provide encouragement, courage, and energy (FERREIRA et al., 2021). Boldo, although known for its hepatic properties, is also used in ritual baths for spiritual cleansing and calming purposes. According to Klein (2022) in addition to being used in ritual baths and fumigation, basil is also used in *aprontamento*, a ritual practice in which, after a bath with seven other plants selected according to the individual's needs, the person remains on the floor for 24 hours.

The second most frequently cited family was Asparagaceae, represented by six species: Lança-de-Ogum (*Sansevieria cylindrica*), Espada-de-Iansã (*Sansevieria* sp.), Espada-de-Ogum (*Sansevieria* sp.), Espada-de-São-Jorge (*Sansevieria trifasciata*), Espada-de-Santa-Bárbara (*Sansevieria trifasciata*), and Peregum-roxo (*Cordyline fruticosa*). This botanical family, found throughout much of Brazil, particularly in Mato Grosso, exhibits diverse growth forms, ranging from herbs to trees. Species of the genus *Sansevieria*—Lança-de-Ogum, Espada-de-São-Jorge, Espada-de-Ogum, and Espada-de-Santa-Bárbara (Figure 3)—are cultivated in front of houses and used as amulets for protection against envy and other negative influences. They are also used in traditional blessings and ritual baths, and individuals may carry a piece of the plant with them as a form of protection (DAVID & PASA, 2017).

Figure 3. Plants of the genus *Sansevieria*. 1. Lança-de-Ogum; 2. Espada-de-Santa-Bárbara; 3. Espada-de-São-Jorge.



Fonte: Klein, 2022.

Araceae, Arecaceae, Fabaceae, and Vitaceae are represented by three species each. The family Arecaceae includes coconut palm (*Cocos nucifera*), African oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*), palha-da-costa (*Raphia taedigera*). It is known as the palm family and comprises approximately 2,600 species distributed across 252 genera (REFLORA, 2025).

Different parts of the African oil palm are used, including the fruits, palm fronds, and leaves, each of which has a specific spiritual function. The fronds are used to prepare amulets that are placed on the doors and windows of terreiros to provide protection and ward off entities (Eguns). The leaves are used to make a type of magical wand that summons and guides these Eguns, while the fruits are used to prepare the so-called Ifá, a type of oracle that indicates the treatment required by the person seeking consultation (ALMEIDA, 2016; BARBOZA et al., 2021).

Fabaceae includes Jatobá (*Hymenaea courbaril*), Feijão (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) and Jurema (*Mimosa tenuiflora*). Mimosa is known for its use in protecting the body and soul and is also widely used in rituals. For example, it is involved in “crossing rituals” and in the fumigation of temples (DAVID & PASA, 2017; ALMEIDA, 2016). This ritual use is also reflected in Umbanda chants that invoke Jurema, Arruda, Guiné, Bejuim, Alecrim and Alfazema as plants associated with fumigation practices (PEREIRA, 2022).

Poaceae, a family of ecological and economic importance, is widely used for human food in the form of cereals and for animal grazing and has a broad geographic distribution. It comprises approximately 793 genera and about 10,000 species (WELKER & WAGNER, 2007). In the present study, four different species were cited: bamboo (*Bambusa* sp.), sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*), lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*), and maize (*Zea mays*).

Maize is used in protection rituals and as an offering to several Orixás in different forms. For example, it is prepared as *canjica* (white maize) for Oxalá; dried red maize is offered to Ogum and Oxóssi, while chopped maize is offered to Ossaim. Fresh maize is used in ritual baths and roasted maize is offered to Oxóssi and Iansã. Popcorn is handled in various ways, including as an offering to Orixás, as shown in Figure 4, particularly to Obaluaiê, in cleansing rituals. During these rituals, the Orixá passes popcorn grains over the body, after which devotees consume some of the popcorn in prayers for health. Popcorn is also used in ritual baths dedicated to Omolu, the Orixá associated with healing. In addition, maize, particularly the ear,

is used to attract good luck and money when placed at the entrance of a house or business (ALMEIDA, 2016; BARBOZA et al., 2021). Insufficient data were available to complete the information for the remaining species.

Figure 4. Popcorn used in a Umbanda ritual at Mãe Sidneia's terreiro, Nossa Senhora do Livramento, BA.



Source: Gui Christ. National Geographic (2025).

The Rosaceae family is also among the families represented in the study, including red, pink, and orange roses (*Rosa* sp.), white rose (*Rosa* × *alba*), and plum (*Prunus domestica*). Although it is represented by relatively few species in the present study, Rosaceae has considerable economic value, as flowers are commonly given as gifts on many occasions and celebrations.

Roses have different properties depending on their colors. White roses, for example, are used in ritual baths and *amacis*, are considered an offering of honor to the Orixás, have a strong connection with the spiritual world, and are used as offerings to Oxalá and Iemanjá (FERREIRA et al., 2021). According to Klein (2022), yellow and orange roses are used as offerings to Iansã and in ritual baths and fumigation for prosperity and to attract positive energies, whereas red roses are believed to attract love and are used as offerings to Pombagira and in ritual baths.

Regarding the ways in which these plants are used, ritual baths are particularly prominent, occurring in more than half of the plants presented. Ritual baths are preparations made from herbs and water and are used to wash the body from the neck downward. They are widely used to cleanse and renew energy (CARLESSI, 2017). They can be prepared in different ways depending on the person seeking spiritual healing, and the herbs may or may not be combined. According to Candomblé traditions, there is also a distinction between even and odd numbers of herbs used in a bath. Baths containing an odd number of herbs are intended to restore balance between mental and spiritual health, whereas those containing an even number are used to maintain this balance (BRANQUINHO, 2007).

Amulets are the second most frequently reported form of use. An amulet can be understood as a small object traditionally attributed with protective or apotropaic properties. This belief dates back centuries, with records of their use in Ancient Egypt documented in papyri (ARROYO, 2021). Today, quilombola communities continue to make frequent use of this form of protection, as mentioned above.

This is followed by fumigation, considered one of the most common forms of interaction between plants and humans in *terreiros*, the places where rituals are performed. This practice is used to open ceremonies by cleansing both people and the ritual space, thereby facilitating the work of spiritual guides. For this reason, it should be performed only by *pais de santo* and *mães de santo* (CARLESSI, 2017).

The third most frequently reported form of use is ritual use itself, although the articles analyzed do not provide details about the specific rituals and only indicate that the plants are used for this purpose. This may be related to the fact that some of the cited species, such as tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*), from the family Solanaceae, are used in several different rituals, some of which are considered secret. Secret rituals, such as animal sacrifices and initiation ceremonies in Candomblé, are a subject of disagreement among some *terreiro* leaders. However, according to Fontes (2015), Exu, the Orixá associated with communication, determines what should remain secret and what may be revealed; therefore, his decision should always be respected.

Offerings, or *Ebós*, are followed by ritual installations. Ritual installations may have more than one meaning. They are considered material representations of the Orixás and of the presence and dwelling place of the entity. They may also constitute initiation rituals in which sacred objects and plants are used to establish the energy of the initiate (RÊGO, 2006). They are also regarded as spaces for worshipping an entity and presenting offerings to it, as part of a process of appeasing the entity by offering something it appreciates in exchange for something the person needs (CAPPONI, 2017).

Finally, one ritual practice cited only once was *benzedura*, involving rue (*Ruta graveolens*), from the family Rutaceae. This practice, performed by traditional healers and *benzedadeiras*, has roots in Catholic traditions as well as African and Indigenous cultural matrices. It consists of blessing the faithful with familiar prayers, such as the *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*, while moving the leaves of certain plants over the person, based on the belief that this process draws away the afflictions affecting them (OLIVEIRA et al., 2024; DAVID & PASA, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to analyze the ritual use of plants in quilombola communities in Mato Grosso, seeking to identify the species used, the types of rituals, and the cultural significance of these practices. This literature review identified 73 plant species, with species from the families Lamiaceae and Asparagaceae standing out as those with the highest numbers of representatives. These species were associated with seven forms of use, particularly ritual baths and fumigation. This literature review showed that a wide range of plant species play central roles in healing, protection, and spiritual strengthening rituals, reflecting the deep connection between quilombola traditions and the plant world.

These uses confirm the close relationship between ethnobotany and quilombola spirituality, in which traditional knowledge of plants transcends the material dimension and becomes part of cultural identity and historical resistance. The study also highlights the importance of traditional knowledge and the need to keep these traditions alive over time, since this knowledge is transmitted orally from generation to generation within quilombola communities.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of ethnobotanical research for understanding the relationship between people and the plant world. This field of research has expanded over the last decade and is particularly relevant in Brazil, a country characterized by high biological and cultural diversity. This reinforces the importance of ethnobotany in understanding and valuing traditional knowledge and in contributing to the preservation of the cultural and environmental diversity of these communities.

Despite the evident diversity of species and their different forms of use, some challenges remain in studying this topic, including the difficulty of finding publications specifically addressing ritual plant use in Mato Grosso and the limited number of studies identified. In addition, specific properties beyond medicinal and food-related uses are poorly documented for some plants. These limitations demonstrate the need for further field-based investigations to expand knowledge of current practices, regional variations, and the social role of plants in rituals, as well as the importance of conducting additional studies on this subject.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that plants play a crucial role in rituals performed by quilombola communities in Mato Grosso, as they are present across all forms of ritual practices identified in this review. In a contemporary context marked by accelerated biodiversity loss and threats to traditional ways of life, documenting and analyzing this knowledge is fundamental to valuing Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage and strengthening cultural and environmental preservation policies.

Therefore, the ritual use of plants represents not only a form of cultural heritage among quilombola communities but also a vital link between nature and spirituality. Studying, valuing, and documenting this knowledge helps keep the memory and culture of these communities alive, contributing to the safeguarding of a heritage that has endured for centuries and continues to be renewed through the practices and beliefs of these traditional communities in Mato Grosso.

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