

The “Green” Tropical Shade Structure

By Eric R Ross

The Palapa is a tropical shade structure. The word Palapa in “Spanish” means open sided dwelling with a thatched roof made out of palm fronds. Palapas are similar in many ways to a tiki hut. A palapa and a tiki hut are both made of dried palm fronds, also known as thatch. There are however some key differences. The first is that a tiki hut is usually enclosed on the sides by walls of palm thatch, while the palapa has open sides. Another important distinction is that the tiki hut is usually designed with structural supports around the edges, while a palapa usually has its supports directly under the roof. Palapas come in all shapes and sizes starting with a single pole and moving up to multiple poles depending on the requirements. Palapas can be customized to fit in practically any area around your home or business. They are mostly used in backyard environments for providing shade and improving the outdoor lifestyle. The most common palapa is a four pole solution because of its shade capacity and usability. Although custom palapa designs can be created to produce variations of practically any size starting at seven feet and growing to about fifty feet. Another popular choice is a single pole palapa but they can sometimes be confused with thatch umbrellas. What distinguishes a true palapa from a thatched umbrella or “tiki umbrella.” is that a palapa is usually attached as a more permanent structure whereas a thatch umbrella is moveable. Also, while an umbrella usually folds up, a palapa is a much more rigid roof structure that does not fold up. It can withstand the winds better and is a year around solution where as a umbrella is mostly seasonal.

A Palapa is designed for more efficient cooling since it allows the breeze to flow through it and has a cooling capability of 10 to 15 degrees cooler than the surrounding area. It is an eco-friendly alternative for shading your backyard, pool area, BBQ or as another outside living space. Some people even use them to shade their animals and or equipment.

Palapas can be found in coastal areas of Mexico, especially in Baja California Mexico and the Gulf of California. In the United States these palapa structures have become popular in Sun Belt areas like Florida, and most especially Southern California and Arizona, where climates and temperatures are conducive to outdoor activities year-round.

A Palapa is a green alternative that helps out our environment. Most if not all of the material used to build a Palapa is considered green material. Starting at the top where palm fronds are used. Instead of ending up at the landfill they are being reused as the roofing material for authentic Palapas. The wood we use to provide support and make the skeleton structure is provided by trees that get replaced with new plantings. This is a concept being practiced in parts of the United States with growing interest. The rope used is made from cultivated plant material called Abaca and is 100% natural fiber. The combination of materials creates a unique green alternative for shade and entertaining.

There are many choices when shading your backyard so if you are considering a home improvement project look at a palapa. Palapas have become a popular solution because of their unique tropical look and feel that appeals too many Arizonan’s. Please feel free to visit our web page at www.thepalapaguy.com or call us at 480 343-6653 to learn more.