This is my account as a first-time ayahuasca brewer and user trying to puzzle out a workable recipe using conflicting information gathered from the internet. I post this in the hope that it may help others in their experimentation. It’s quite long and detailed, because I was exploring many questions about optimal preparation and consumption. I focus on these aspects.

First, let me say about myself that I am a PhD student in cognitive psychology, interested in consciousness and the workings of the mind. I’ve taken a graduate psychopharmacology class and done lots of reading on the subject. I have been a life-long empiricist and atheist until I was introduced to psychedelics by my boyfriend about 4 months ago, which has spurred a sort of spiritual awakening and exploration. Starting out with small doses of psilocybin mushrooms, which he grew himself, I have worked my way up from mild trips to a full-blown 6-gram (dried weight) experience. I have also used weed a bit (not very often, I have a difficult time smoking), salvia a few times (plain, 5x, 10x and 20x – all of which I found interesting but too short lasting) and amanita muscaria (which was pleasant, contrary to many internet accounts). My typical drug of choice is alcohol, both beer and red wine, rarely liquor, and I drink several times a week. I’ve also tired nootropics (piracetam, aniracetam) and antidepressants (Effexor, Celexa, Lexapro, Prozac, St. John’s Wort).

My boyfriend is a very experienced psychedelic user, of at least 20 years duration, but had never tried ayahuasca and had always wanted to. We wanted to use the brew for meaningful spiritual exploration, not simply as a new or more intense high. He also is a near daily user of cannabis, and used some throughout the experience detailed below. I did not.

So we decided to welcome in the year 2012 by brewing some. I tried to find an appropriate recipe online by browsing the internet. This was the first problem, as there is extreme variation in recipes, measures and methods. We wanted to start out with an authentic traditional recipe, just Banisteriopsis caapi (sometimes by itself called ayahuasca) and Psychotria viridis (chacruna), with no other additives. However, I found recipes that called for 1:1, 2:1 and 3:1 ratios of caapi to chacruna. Even more confusing, some recipes called for a certain number of chacruna leaves, not a given weight. Leaf size was not specified either. And while some recipes specified fresh
chacruna, few mentioned dried. More often, recipes just gave a weight, not mentioning fresh or dried at all. I was left wondering which to use and if there was any difference in potency between the two, suspecting that there must be. As mushroom users know, there’s a big difference between the weight of fresh and dried you should use. Likewise, when cooking, you must use much more fresh herb (of any sort, such as basil, etc) than dried. To further confuse the issue, at least three different types of caapi were available – red, white, and yellow – in several different forms – shredded, powdered or whole young vine. Allusions were made to different characteristics of different strains/colors, such as “white is hardest to work with,” but nothing specific. Most recipes just said “caapi.” How to decide?

In the spirit of experimentation, I ordered 4 oz (112g) each of white shredded bark, yellow powdered, and young red vine said to be from a strain from T. McKenna’s plantation. I also ordered 150 g of dried chacruna leaves. The leaves arrived broken into many pieces – there was no way to tell how many leaves there had been originally. Good thing I decided to go by weight. The leaves were a dark blackish green in color, and slightly dusty smelling. The shredded caapi looked and smelled like rough mulch. My goal was to use a 1:1 ratio of about 200 g of caapi to 200 g of chacruna, and these were the best approximations I could get based on how the items were packaged and sold.

Following is the digest of a lot conflicting recipes and accounts that I read – at least 50 from both websites and academic journals (Journal of Psychoactive Drugs is a good one, as is Psychopharmacology; good researchers are Callaway and Riba. I will give specific references at the end of this account). I found several recurring themes.

1) Some accounts suggested that a smaller proportion of caapi to chacruna resulted in less stomach upset – we were quite cognizant of the fact that we might vomit or have diarrhea, and wanted to minimize it. So I settled on a using close to a 1:1 ratio of caapi to chacruna. I ended up using the white shredded bark and red young vines, for a total of 224 grams of caapi, and the whole bag of 150 g of chacruna. (So if you want to get technical, it’s a ratio of about 1.5:1). See Note 1 at the end of this account for more info about the appropriate/tolerable amount of caapi.

2) Some recipes advised throwing everything in a big pot together and boiling for 10-12 hours. Others said to prepare each plant separately and to do multiple washes/extractions, then to either combine them at the end or to drink separately. The timing varied from boiling each wash from 5 minutes to 2-3 hours! It seemed from reading many accounts that the most stomach upset/vomiting occurred from the “throw everything together and boil vigorously for 10-12 hour” recipes, while the “do several washes, simmer and strain” recipes led to less vomiting and nausea.

3) Some recipes said to add a teaspoon of so of lemon juice, lime juice, or vinegar, to each wash, though they didn’t say why. Later reading suggested that acidifying the water speeded up the extraction process – thus, requiring a shorter amount of time simmering. Perhaps that was why some recipes said to boil for as little as 5 minutes per wash. A few recipes called for using grapefruit, orange or pineapple juice to make the resulting liquid sweeter – however, in their results, the brewers who used these methods often complained the ayahuasca “didn’t work”, so I
steered away from using these juices, which aren’t as acidic as lemon or lime or vinegar. (In reading technical accounts in academic journals, I found that most analyses of authentic ayahuasca found it to have a pH of about 3.5, eg Callaway 2005.) A few accounts said to use anywhere from 250-1000 mg citric acid, presumably dumped out of a capsule or a dissolved dietary supplement. One recipe used “muratic acid”, which I assumed meant “muriatic acid”, which is liquid hydrochloric acid (HCl), a corrosive acid used in swimming pools and for cleaning masonry and doesn’t seem at all a good idea for something you’re going to drink! That recipe produced vomiting, according to its author.

4) Some recipes said to boil; others said never to boil, only to simmer. I mostly simmered, even though that meant it took longer to reduce the liquid. Later I read that simmering rather than boiling resulted in a sweeter (or at least less bitter) brew, due to “no carmelization of the plant material” (according to the author) at below boiling temperatures. My brew was bitter, but not too bad. (One discussion thread I found online said not to boil, as you would destroy (“vaporize,” they said) the DMT by doing so. However, no other accounts said anything about this. Nonetheless, I tried to mostly simmer the liquids, as I certainly didn’t want to lose any DMT, though I think it must vaporize at a higher temperature than boiling.)

5) Most recipes were quite clear against using aluminum pots, saying toxic aluminum salts could result, especially with an acidifying agent. I made sure my pans were non-aluminum. Pyrex (glass) is a good idea.

6) Most recipes advised using distilled water to avoid any added chemicals, such as chlorine. I did so, about 4.5 gallons altogether (which was reduced by simmering over 6 hours to about 4 cups total).

7) Many experienced users recommended brewing 2 doses per person, in case one was lost to vomiting. Of course, defining a dose was quite confusing due to all the conflicting recipes. I defined a dose as approximately 50 g of caapi and 50 g of dried chacruna. Though the proportions I ended up using were slightly different (I ended up consuming extract from about 60 g caapi and 40 g chacruna.)

8) Some recipes said to drink the caapi about 30 minutes prior to the chacruna. Others said to mix together and drink at the same time. We decided to keep ours separate and 30 minutes apart, thinking that way the MAOI in the caapi would have time to work before the DMT-containing chacruna. (Naturally occurring MAOs in the digestive tract break down oral DMT – the MAO inhibitor in the caapi prevents this. It seemed logical that we should give the MAOI a little bit of time to start inhibiting the MAO before we consumed the DMT so as to reduce breakdown and optimize absorption.)

9) Many recipes advised straining/filtering several times and/or letting the sediment naturally settle over time, suggesting the sediment caused gagging and triggered vomiting. So we did so.

The brew preparation
T –9.00. At 9:30 am, I added 112 g of white shredded caapi bark, 112 grams of young red caapi
v 2/3 gallon of distilled water, and a big squirt of lemon and lime juices (probably about a teaspoon’s worth) to a saucepan and brought it to a boil. I then simmered and stirred it for an hour. The liquid turned a dark reddish-brown immediately. I had tried to further grind the young red vine in my coffee grinder, but had no luck, it kept getting caught and wouldn’t really grind, so I just broke it into smaller pieces and threw it in the pot. In retrospect, I wish I had pounded it or crushed it or tried harder to break open the red vine, because I feel like the resulting extract was weak.

At the same time, I put the 150 grams of dried, broken up chacruna leaves in a different pot with 2/3 gallon of water and a squirt of lemon and lime juices and brought it to a boil. I then simmered it for 2 hours, stirring quite often. At first the liquid was dark greenish-brown, but over several hours it became black. (It looked like black bean soup.)

T –8.00. At 10:30 am, I took the caapi liquid out, filtered it through a wire mesh strainer, and put it in a smaller saucepan to reduce. I added another 2/3 gallon of water plus more lemon and lime juices to the original caapi vine/bark and simmered it for another hour or so. (The instructions I found online had suggested simmering each wash for anywhere from 5 minutes to 2-3 hours; I compromised on 1-2 hours.) Now I had 3 pans going: the original caapi and chacruna, and one more caapi liquid only.

T –7.00. At 11:30 am, I strained the chacruna (it seemed to take longer to steep than the caapi – the leaves floated on the surface, and I kept the heat lower so they wouldn’t float over the top). Now I had 4 pans going, the 2 original brews and 2 liquids to reduce. I returned the chacruna to the pot, added more distilled water (enough to cover, still about 2/3 gallon) and more lemon and lime juices and brought to a boil, then simmer, again.

T -6.00 through T -3.00. I repeated this process 1 more time each with the caapi and chacruna, so that each gave 3 washes total. By 3:30 I had only the 2 pots with liquid reducing on the stove and was done with the vine and leaves, which I composted.

At various times, I strained each liquid, first using a small mesh wire strainer, like one of those “permanent” coffee filters, then later trying to use a paper coffee filter. The sediment clogged the paper coffee filter, and I gave up on that method.

T -2.00. I kept filtering, simmering and reducing the liquids until I had slightly less than 2 cups of each. This took until about 4:30 pm. At this point, I poured each out into a large glass container so that further sediment could settle to the bottom.

Some side notes on the cooking process: For at least the first few hours, my kitchen smelled strongly of dirt and mulch. At first it was a very acrid, pungent smell, and it spread throughout the house. However, the smell mellowed very much over time, and after a few hours was non-objectionable.

Also, quite a lot of steam was produced throughout this entire process – I had the kitchen exhaust fan going for hours and a window cracked open even though it was snowing outside. Windows throughout the house fogged over. We felt as though we were actually in a steamy rainforest.

Personal preparation and consumption
Knowing that the caapi is a MAOI (monoamine oxidase inhibitor), we abstained from tyramine rich foods all day (no aged cheeses, meats, alcohol, etc.), but didn’t entirely fast. (Many ayahuasca drinkers describe fasting for a day or two before imbibing, but we felt ok just abstaining from problem foods). I had coffee with nonfat milk at about 8 am (T –10.5), but no food. My boyfriend had black coffee and a piece of dry toast with strawberry jelly at noon (T –6.5), as well as a clementine in the late afternoon. I had 2-3 cups of peppermint tea (100% peppermint leaf) throughout the afternoon, and 3 saltine crackers. I hoped the peppermint might help reduce nausea.

T 0. At 6:15 pm, we were ready. We had slightly less than 2 cups total of each liquid, which I had calculated to be 4 doses. I scooped out about c. of caapi for each of us, trying to leave most of the sediment in the bottom. At this point, the liquid was no longer a dark reddish-brown, but a light yellowish-brown. After offering a prayer, we sipped our drinks over about 15-20 minutes. We had read that sipping it slowly over time helped reduce nausea. It was bitter, but not as bad as I’d been expecting.

T +0.5. After a hour, I scooped out about . c. of the chacruna liquid for each of us. This was dark black, like black bean soup, and had a lot of sediment. Both of us felt fine before drinking the chacruna, no nausea at all. Once again, we sipped slowly over about 15-20 minutes. It was very bitter and chalky, much worse tasting and grittier than the caapi, but not awful. As my boyfriend neared the end of his, he noted that it contained a lot of sediment. As soon as he said that, he said he was going to lose it and ran to the bathroom. He spent about the next 10 minutes vomiting up everything. I continued to sip mine slowly, avoiding the sediment. At one point when I neared the sediment, I nearly gagged, but was able to stop it. Also, he had consumed a Clementine right before the caapi, (plus the toast and coffee earlier) while I hadn’t eaten anything but the 3 saltines around noon and the peppermint tea. Wikipedia, citing Ott (1994), says that traditionally “caffeine” and “citrus” are avoided prior to ayahuasca consumption, though recent researchers are casting doubt on whether these dietary restrictions are necessary. (See note #2 below.)

##EROWID_NOTE:MAOI_COMBINATION##

T +1.00. I feel fine, no nausea. My boyfriend feels better after purging, but doesn’t want to try any more ayahuasca. We sit back to wait, watching some videos. I’d read that onset of effects could take anywhere from 20 minutes to 2 hours, and more toward the longer end if you sipped it slowly rather than chugging it all at once, so I’m trying to be patient.

T +1.50. I examine myself for signs of effects. I feel slightly warm and flushed, a feeling I associate with serotonin (as from taking a migraine pill), maybe a bit of tightness around my eyes like I get with mushroom onset, but no CEV or other effects. We close our eyes and perhaps imagine that we are seeing the slightest flashes of color. I am impatient. My boyfriend smokes a bowl.

T +2.00. Still nothing. I conclude the brew didn’t work. I pull out a bag of Syrian rue and chew up about a gram’s worth of seeds, thinking maybe I didn’t make the caapi strong enough or drink enough for the MAOI to work. I pour myself an additional c. each of both caapi and chacruna and start sipping. I also eat about 10 saltines, figuring it’s a lost cause. I’m feeling good,
chatty, energized, bubbly, which I attribute to the MAOI effects of the caapi (MAOIs are used as antidepressants; caapi on its own is also said to be a stimulant, eg Rodd 2008), but feel nothing else.

In the meantime, my boyfriend is feeling better and decides to try to salvage the evening by brewing a psilocybin mushroom tea. It is New Year’s Eve after all, and we are afraid to drink alcohol due to the MAOI. We have a small amount of shrooms, about 1-2 g (unfortunately, we didn’t weight them), estimated at enough for one person to have a very mild experience. In a “what the heck, why not?” mode, we toss the mushrooms in a pan along with about 1 gram of crushed Syrian rue (also an MAOI, we hope it might potentiate and “stretch” the mushrooms), then also add 25 g of amanita muscaria we’ve been meaning to try (he’s never had any, but I had tested myself on 5 grams brewed into a tea a few weeks ago. I found them to have a very mild effect, similar to drinking a glass of wine, and no nausea; these are a mixture of grade A large 3” Latvian caps and grade A+ small 1” Washington caps ordered from the internet). We also add a slice of fresh ginger and herbal peppermint-based tea (not 100% peppermint leaf – this is “Candy Cane Lane” Xmas decaf green tea, and also contains milk thistle – recommended by several online accounts to go with the amanita – vanilla, and other flavors).

T +2.25. We drink our tea over about 15-20 minutes, wary of nausea from the amanitas. We experience none. We are listening to Icaros of the Shipibo people culled from the internet to get us in the proper spiritual frame of mind.

T +2.50 or so. Onset is rapid. Something has finally worked in a major way. I don’t know if it was the extra MAOI from the additional caapi or Syrian rue, or the shrooms, or simply time. At this point I lose all sense of time. The rest of the night is sheer magic for me, though not quite as strong for my boyfriend since he lost most or all of his ayahuasca, and I had an additional gram of Syrian rue. Let me just say the experience was everything I had read about and hoped for, totally cosmic, spiritual, out of body. I am full of love and gratitude and feel a sense of timelessness and eternity and oneness with the universe, I feel my boyfriend and I are dreaming its creation. I feel whole and complete and perfect. I feel accepting of every part of myself, even the parts I dislike and try to hide. I feel healed. I have wonderful OEV and CEV. I want this moment to last forever. I feel suspended in time. Spirits walk with us and we commune with them. My boyfriend sees the Mayan calendar unraveled in his mind, and speaks with ancient shamans.

In contrast to my previous experiences with mushrooms, which were more autobiographical in tone (eg, working out conflict with my mother and my brother, reliving childhood, reuniting with my dead father), this one is strictly about myself and my relation to the cosmos.

My experience lasts roughly from 10 pm til 4:30 am, when I start to come out of the bliss phase but am still seeing splashes of color with my eyes open. My boyfriend’s experience, while nearly as intense, ended about 1 hours previously. (He said it was close to, but not the most, intense experience he’d ever had.) Throughout this roughly 6 hours, he also smoked a bit, estimating that in total he consumed 2 bowls of what he called “high grade” weed.

T +10. Aftermath: We feel a little twitchy, and my muscles feel as if I worked out my upper body
with weights and did a bit of light running or biking. My whole body feels stiff when I stand up to
go to the bathroom, and walking feels strange. Mentally, I feel centered, energized, blissful – just
really, really good. We have a bit of trouble falling asleep (have some great sex – body sensations
are definitely heightened!), and stay awake for another hour or so. Finally fall asleep by about 6
am and sleep til about 10 am. We awake ravenous and have the best food we have ever tasted in
our lives. He feels tired and “heavy” and unmotivated all day, which he partially attributes to the
weed, but I continue to feel great, with only a bit of a headache and “jaw clench” (both of which I
tend to get from too much serotonin – analyses of blood plasma levels in ayahuasca drinkers have
shown elevated serotonin levels for 1-2 days afterward, eg Calloway 1999, and I subjectively feel
as if my serotonin levels are high).

T +40. The next morning, (this is now 2 days later) I start to feel a bit shaky, sweaty, and light-
headed, a feeling I get when tapering off antidepressants too quickly (I’m not taking any currently
or wouldn’t have messed around with an MAOI). I pop a 100 mg 5-HTP capsule (a serotonin
precursor) and quickly feel better. Except the headache/jaw clench returns, but it’s not too bad,
overall I still feel great and energized.

Both of us rated this as one of the most spiritual experiences we have ever had. I don’t know
what single element or combination of elements finally worked, but it was simply magic. We’re
looking forward to trying a slightly different version, made with Syrian rue and mimosa, and will
definitely try the mushroom/Syrian rue combo on its own again, as well as amanitas on their own
or maybe with Syrian rue. But a word of warning: make sure you know what you’re dealing with,
especially as regards the MAOI. Look it up online, make sure you eat correctly. And be prepared
for vomiting or diarrhea. I was lucky – I had no nausea at all, but I tend to have a strong stomach.
I believe the low proportion of caapi to chacruna, the slow sipping, and the filtering out of the
majority of sediment all helped to reduce the nausea/vomiting experience.

Admittedly, in scientific terms this was not a “clean” experiment – too many variables. However,
I think the differences between our 2 experiences, the fact that mine lasted nearly 2 hours longer
and was so blissful, was due to the additional MAOI and DMT I consumed. Since my boyfriend
vomited so early, we assume he lost all of his DMT and most of the MAOI from the caapi. And
as an experienced mushroom user, he said he got much more of an effect out of the paltry 0.5-1
g of mushrooms he consumed than he would have expected, which we attribute to the MAOI in
the Syrian rue. (Like all psychedelics, mushrooms increase levels of serotonin; the MAOI allows
this serotonin to last longer rather than being broken down right away, thus “potentiating” or
intensifying the mushrooms’ effects. In other online accounts I read, it seems as if adding a MAOI
effectively doubles the dose of mushrooms.)

Note to point #1, about proportion of caapi and vomiting: Calloway (2005) suggested that the
effective dose of caapi in terms of MAOI is near the “point of emesis” (vomiting, that is). He
believes vomiting is a “natural reflex” against an overdose of the harmala alkaloids in the caapi
that function as the MAOI. Thus, he believes it is impossible to take a fatal dose. The point
here is that the effective dose hovers right around the amount that makes you vomit. The MAOI
also increases intestinal “motility” (by increasing gut serotonin levels) according to Calloway – too
much motility leads to explosive expulsion of the contents of your gut, from the other end.

Note #2, about dietary restrictions. Conventional wisdom on the internet says that since the harmala alkaloids in the caapi (and Syrian rue) function as MAOIs, all tyramine containing foods should be avoided before and after use. However, it appears that these alkaloids are reversible MAOIs (the irreversible MAOIs, such as drugs used as antidepressants, take up to 2 weeks to recover from) and furthermore only act on the MAO-A system, leaving the MAO-B system intact and working, thus dietary restrictions might be unnecessary. However, in the lack of definitive research, I figure better safe than sorry! Additionally, recent and seemingly little publicized research on coffee found it to inhibit both the MAO-A and MAO-B systems (Herraiz, 2006). Thus, perhaps my boyfriend had more MAO inhibition going on at the time of drinking the chacruna than I did, which may have caused his vomiting, since as Callaway (2005) found, the effective vs. vomiting-inducing doses are quite close.

Another note: In several analyses of ayahuasca ingredients, Calloway et al. (2005) found wide variation in the levels of active components. For instance, 32 samples of caapi varied from containing 0.31 mg/g to 8.43 mg/g of harmaline alkaloids, while 36 samples of chacruna varied between containing 0.0 mg/g (yes, 0) of DMT to 7.5 mg/g. Furthermore, levels of DMT in chacruna leaves taken from the same plant at different times over the course of a day could vary in strength. This natural variation only makes it more difficult to estimate proper amounts of the plants to use in tea making. Thus, I believe you should brew at least 2 doses per person and be patient (wait at least 2 hours) before taking more. Leftovers can be frozen for future use, according to internet accounts. I have one leftover dose frozen, and will see how it works in a future encounter.

I also have 4 oz (112 g) of the yellow powdered caapi left to experiment with. Powdered bark was said to be hard to work with by many online accounts – after dealing with the sediment and its filter-clogging and gag-triggering effects, I now understand why. If I use it in the future, I may try to construct some kind of giant “tea bag” filter, maybe sewing 2 coffee filters together around it or finding some very fine cheesecloth to bag it in.

References: (there’s links to some of these on Wikipedia’s ayahuasca page)


The entire June 2005 issue of the Journal of Psychoactive Drugs is devoted to ayahuasca. Many of these articles are from that issue.

[Erowid Correction Nov 2 2013: changed mention of ‘citric acid (vitamin C)’ to just ‘citric acid’. Though ascorbic acid (aka Vitamin C) is also used for home acidic extractions, the author is probably referring to recipes that suggest citric acid.]