

## WELCOME TO THE FISH BAY NATIVE PLANT GARDEN



Tyre Palm

**This garden shows the types of plants and trees that grow best and naturally in Fish Bay.**

**Before you excavate, use this garden area as a guide to what could grow on your land or may already be there. Tag trees on your building site for saving and only excavate the area covering the footprint of the home you are building.**

**This garden is in greenspace owned by the Island Resources Foundation which permitted this education use. The Estate Fish Bay Owners' Association was awarded a grant from the VI Department of Agriculture, Urban & Community Forestry Program to fund this project. Members of the community volunteered many hours to prepare the site, plant, and install the garden path and Eleanor Gibney, St John's own botanist, guided us and was instrumental in creating this brochure.**

**Thank you to all.**

### **Bay rum - *Pimenta racemosa***

This beautiful native tree is the source of aromatic oil that is mixed with alcohol or rum to make the cologne or lotion known as bay rum which was extremely popular around the world in the period between 1880 and 1940. St. John was a major producer of bay oil. Locally, leaves are also used in home remedies and cooking. A medium sized evergreen tree, with smooth bark and very dark green spicy-scented foliage.



Bay Rum

### **Birchberry or Privet eugenia - *Eugenia ligustrina***

A pretty shrub or small tree that makes an excellent hedge. The berries are edible, with a sweet, juicy, and slightly aromatic flesh.

### **Black calabash - *Amphetheca latifolia***

A native relative of the commoner calabash or gobi tree, black calabash is restricted to the larger guts and areas that receive a lot of freshwater runoff. It bears small round gourd fruits and dark-green, glossy foliage.

### **Black mampoo - *Guapira fragrans***

Among the commonest trees in St. John's forests, black mampoo is relatively nondescript, often best recognized by the small brown wart-like galls that are almost always present on the foliage. The galls are formed around

insect eggs—a species of fly that lays eggs only on black mampoo leaves—and do not harm the tree. The related water mampoo (*Pisonia subcordata*) is common in drier parts of the island.

**Bulletwood or balata** - *Manilkara bidentata*

One of the most valuable of native woods, bullet is now rare in the Virgin Islands, found only on Bordeaux Mt. on St. John, and Sage Mt. on Tortola. The hard, strong wood is similar to mahogany, and the tree can grow to over 100 ft. tall. The rather gummy fruit is edible, similar to the related sapodilla.

**Ebonyberry or black ironwood** - *Kugiodendron ferreum*

Although it is not well known, this unassuming small tree possesses one of the hardest and heaviest woods in the world, with a specific gravity up to 1.4 (this is a measure of density, with the density of water being 1, thus this wood is 40% denser than water). The trees are generally too small to allow the harvesting of useable wood. The black berries are edible, although rather insipid in flavor.

**False mahogany or pigturd or angelin** - *Andira inermis*

A common medium to large tree of moist forests throughout tropical America, andira is beautiful in bloom, with masses of purple pea-type flowers in large panicles. The wood is very attractive and has been used extensively for furniture, turned items and construction.

**Giant philodendron** - *Philodendron giganteum*

One of two native philodendrons on St. John, this bushy semi-climber is highly “tropical” in appearance. It is found only in a few guts and mountain forests, but is adaptable to cultivation in any part of the island with moderate to high moisture.

**Guavaberry** - *Myrciaria floribunda*

One of numerous small-leaved native trees in the myrtle family, guavaberry is distinct in its pale and very smooth bark., similar to the related guava. The berries, which may be either orange or dark purple, are highly flavorful and aromatic. Virgin Islanders have long traditions of making a Christmas liqueur, delicious tarts and other holiday treats from this highly esteemed fruit. Usually flowering in May or June, with fruit maturing from September to November.



**Guavaberry**

**Hoopvine** - *Trichostigma octandrum*

A massive woody vine in the pokeweed family, hoop is common in forests and moister disturbed areas throughout the island. The smaller stems were used extensively in the manufacture of market baskets on St. John. Baskets were sold in St. Thomas and exported to the States during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Inkberry** - *Randia aculeata*

The traditional Christmas tree of the Virgin Islands, inkberry is a common shrub or small tree in the coffee family. Intensely fragrant small white flowers mature into white berries that are dark blue on the inside, reportedly used for ink at one time.



**Kapok**

**Kapok or Silk Cotton - *Ceiba pentandra***

In contrast to all of the slow-growing hardwoods found in the area, the kapok is a rapidly developing giant, and typically forms very large buttress roots as it matures. Younger trees have many spines on the trunk, but these wear off with time. Caribbean Amerindians used kapoks for dugout canoes, and many cultures have regarded them as Spirit trees. Large light-colored flowers are nocturnal, pollinated (enthusiastically) by bats, and become large pods filled with seeds in masses of soft light fibers used extensively for stuffing pillows and life-preservers before synthetics.

**Lady-of-the-night - *Brunfelsia americana***

One of the most fragrant flowers of the region, brunfelsia has no aroma in the daytime, but releases a unique and lovely fragrance through the night. The long-tubed flowers, pollinated by moths, open white and turn yellow by the second night.

**Marron bacora - *Solanum polygamum***

Long thought to be extinct, this shrub is now found growing wild only on St. John, since its rediscovery in the 1990s. The beautiful violet flowers are followed by relatively large conical yellow fruits, blooming at any time of year in response to rain.



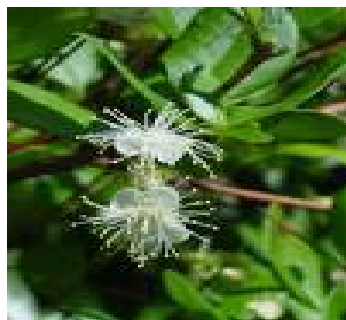
**Marron bacora**

**Mastic - *Sideroxylum foetidissimum***

Mastic was probably one of the dominant trees of the original forests on St. John; it is now beginning to make a comeback after centuries of felling for its excellent timber. The trees are tall and very straight, with attractive foliage; the flowers are much visited by bees, and birds and bats consume the small sticky fruit.

**Pepper cinnamon - *Myrcianthes fragrans***

A cousin to the better-known bay rum, this beautiful tree has spicy foliage with a suggestion of eucalyptus in the scent, and gorgeous smooth golden bark that flakes off to expose a new layer beneath, bright orange when it's newly revealed. Pepper cinnamon was used for respiratory ailments, headaches and fainting, as well as medicinal baths.



**Pepper Cinnamon**

**Rodwood or West Indian birch** - *Eugenia biflora*, *Eugenia monticola*, *Eugenia procera*

We group these closely related members of the myrtle family together, since they are difficult for many people to distinguish among, anyway. Hardwooded, evergreen and aromatic, all these eugenias are common around much of the island. Some were used for the framing of fishpots (originally woven from palm fronds, later made from chicken wire); all have edible berries, some much tastier than others.

**Scrub-brush anthurium** - *Anthurium acaule*

This common native anthurium has large ornamental leaves, inconspicuous flowers and bright red fruits; when the leaves die, they leave fibrous skeletons that were formerly used as pot-scrubbers.

**Spoonberry** - *Bysnonima spicata*

A tall tree of mountain forests, spoonberry bears quantities of yellow flowers in early summer

**Tyre palm** - *Coccothrinax alta*

This tall, slender palm-- also called a broom palm and thatch palm—is the only common native palm on St. John. The fronds were formerly used extensively for making brooms, hats, and fish pots; and for thatching buildings.

**Wattapama** - *Poitea florida*

Like many native plants, the wattapama is a rain-response bloomer—a drenching rain after a dry period in spring will trigger abundant pinkish-purple flowers along the wand-like branches. A small tree, wattapama is found only in Puerto Rico and the northern VI.

**West Indian locust** - *Hymanea courbaril*

A very handsome large tree, with an important and beautiful commercial wood ( known as red locust), and a heavy resinous sap ( Brazilian copal) that is used medicinally. The large hard pods contain an edible pulp similar to carob, but they don't smell very good, leading to another common name: “stinking toe”.

**White caper** - *Capparis indica*

One of many members of the caper family on St. John, this small tree has attractive white flowers and conspicuous seed pods—long and stringy, they open to reveal a bright orange-red lining around the seeds.



**White caper**

**White cedar** - *Tabebuia heterophylla*

This slow-growing tree is related to trumpet vines, not cedars, but the very strong light-colored wood led to the local name. The wood was considered the best in the West Indies for the ribs and framing of boats, so few mature trees remain on the islands, since it takes at least 100 years to achieve their potential size. Delicate pale pink trumpet-shaped blooms may be produced at any time of year, but most reliably in the spring.

**White cinnamon** - *Maytenus laevigata*

There is a mystery in the common name of this tree, which bears no resemblance to cinnamon in any way, but the “white” part is easy to find: the bark is typically light gray or white, and there is a thin white edge all around the very leathery dark-green leaves. This is a beautiful tree, common in many of older forests in moister sections of the island.

**White prickle** - *Zanthoxylum martinicensis*

A fast –growing tree of moister forests, white prickle has scattered large spines on the trunk, which cause it to be confused with other local tree species (see yellow prickle, below).

**Wild-coffee** - *Casearia guianensis*

A small tree, most common in disturbed moist areas, wild-coffee is not related to coffee, but can look somewhat like it, especially when fruiting. The slender, flexible, but highly durable stems of this plant were once woven into walls of houses and other buildings. Coated with clay or coral-based mortar, these wattle and daub structures were common on St. John up until the 1960s.

**Wild frangipani -- *Plumeria alba***

Wild frangipani is among the hardiest of native trees, thriving under extreme conditions of drought and wind. Large clusters of wonderfully fragrant white flowers are produced through most of the year. The trees are periodically defoliated by large and colorful frangipani caterpillars-- the larva of a pseudosphinx moth—but rebound quickly.



**Wild frangipani**

**Yellow prickle - *Zanthoxylum monophyllum***

One of several related species in the VI, *Zanthoxylum* means “yellow wood” and yellow prickle wood is indeed very yellow. A multi-trunked small tree, with distinctive knobby spines covering the bark, and somewhat citrus-scented foliage. While several other local trees (sandbox, kapok, white prickle) have spiny bark, this is the only one in which the spines totally cover the surface. Yellow prickle has been used as a dye, a medicine, and for small wooden items.