

RICHARD (BLUE) JONES
BAHAMIAN
BUSH
MEDICINE
GARDEN

CAPTAIN ROLAND ROBERTS HOUSE
ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER
OPERATED BY REEF RELIEF IN
COOPERATION ARCHITECTURAL
PRESERVATION FOUNDATION
Green Turtle Cay
Abaco, Bahamas

Bahamians have used indigenous plants for medicinal purposes for hundreds of years. This tradition, called "bush medicine" was brought to the Bahamas by African slaves and gained importance in the out islands where doctors were rarely available. Cat Islanders, have the reputation for longevity. They attribute bush medicine with keeping them healthy. Nearly 100 plants in the islands of the Bahamas have been used to cure many ailments. In fact, some of these herbal remedies are beginning to be used by herbalists and natural health practitioners worldwide as viable treatments for serious illness.

ALOE VERA (Aloe succotrina)- The latex "bitter aloe" acts as a strong purgative and the jelly-like substance obtained by slitting and scraping the gel, applied directly to skin, burns or sunburn, alleviates pain. If a leaf is cut lengthwise, spread flat in a frying pan and warmed it is said to cure sores if placed directly on the affected part. The gel is said to remove wrinkles. There are numerous healing claims. According to legend, aloe is the only plant brought from the Garden of Eden by Adam when he was expelled. From this original shoot, all other aloes are believed to have sprung earning the name "shoot of Paradise."

BANANA (disambiguation) - A giant herb native to Southeast Asia but is cultivated in every tropical region of the world. Economically, it is the most important fruit world wide and ranks 4th after rice, wheat and maize in human consumption. In the poorer regions of the world it is the major food crop. There are many varieties of banana, some being more starchy than sweet, but it is suggested that the cultivation of banana goes as far back as 5,000 BC. Throughout Bahamian history the Banana has been used to treat blisters, burns, diarrhoea and fever. The skin of the banana can be rubbed on as an insect repellent along with onion, garlic and chili pepper.

BAY GERANIUM, SOAP BUSH (*ambrosia hispida*) - Can be made into a soap to relieve itching skin. It is highly recommended for indigestion, and used by people declining to clear the lungs. It is widely used for the common cold. It has antihistaminic properties and is a diaphoretic (causes sweating). A strong tea is made and served hot with lime and salt.

BAY LAVENDER (*Argusia gnaphalodes*) -A tea used to treat fevers, gonorrhoea, syphilis, bladder stones, kidney problems, fish poisoning, rheumatism, and to induce abortions.

BLUE FLOWER (*valerianoides jamaicensis*) Used as a drink for fevers and for cooling the blood. A leaf bound directly on a boil will bring the pus to the surface. As a wash for the skin it will relieve irritations. It will also relieve constipation, colic and gas in babies.

BUTTERCUP (*turnera ulmifolia*) - Used in the treatment of "the gripes" and menstrual disorders, also in constipation and stomach pains in infants.

CACTUS-PRICKLY PEAR (*Opuntia dillenii*)-The ripe, red fruit can be eaten raw or baked, and can also be made into jellies and wine. All parts of this thorny plant are useful for food or medicines. The jel of the plant is used for healing wounds.

CASTOR BEAN (*Ricinus communis*) -Young leaves are good for sore breast and bursitis pain. It has been used for hemorrhoid pain.

DANGER! -Children could conceivably die from as few as three beans; adults may die from consuming eight.

"CATNIP" SMALL WHITE SAGE (*salvia serotina*) - Sought after as an appetizer, used as a health drink in pregnancy. It is given to children to rid them of worms and is considered beneficial in colds, influenza, to relieve an itching skin and as a nasal douche for sinus.

CERASEE, ART PUMPKIN (*momordica charantia*)

A tea made of the vine is used for diabetes, hypertension, worms, dysentery, malaria and as a general tonic as a blood purifier. It is also very effective to relieve constipation and colds and fevers in children. As a tea it has been known to be used by women in Latin America for menstrual problems and to promote discharge after childbirth. It is said that if the tea is taken 9 days after giving birth it cleans out and tones up all the organs involved in the delivery. For the same reasons it has been used as a natural method of birth control by taking 2 cups each day after intercourse for 3 days. As a wash, the tea is used externally for sores, rashes, shin ulcers and all skin problems. As a bath it is good for arthritis, rheumatism, gout and other similar ailments. It also has claim to sooth the skin and used to treat fever, flu, congestion, and cramps.

CORN SILK (*zea mays*) - used to reduce acidic conditions in the body, aid in the kidneys and cleansing the blood.. Use only fresh corn silk tea, one spoon to a cup of boiling water. Also good for bed wetting.

DILL (*anethum graveolens*) - Dill is a common seasoning herb. It is used as a tea to sooth infants colic and mild stomach pains in adults. It can be taken anytime.

FEVER GRASS, LEMON GRASS (*Andropogon citratus*) - It is considered a cleanser and a relaxer. Lemon Grass is principally taken as a tea to remedy digestive problems such as diarrhea, flatulence and stomach ache. It is particularly suitable for children. Aids in lowering fever from the flu. If applied externally as a poultice or diluted into an essential oil it can be used on pain from arthritis.

GALE OF WIND, MIMOSA, HURRICANE WEED (*phyllanthus amarus*) - This weed grows wild near the beach, and is used to make tea to reduce fever and as a tonic to improve the appetite, constipation, typhoid fever, flu and colds. It is called the "stone breaker plant" because it has been used for generations to eliminate gallstones or kidney stones. It's popular herbal treatment is due to the fact that it is said to have no side effects or toxicity. It has been a focus of a great deal of research in recent years because of it's antiviral qualities and may even be useful in treating hepatitis and the HIV virus.

GUM ELEMI , GUMBOLIMBO (*bursera simaruba*) - Used as a tea for rheumatism. Brew it and put it in the bath to relieve back pain. The leaves crushed and made into a poultice removes the sting from bees and wasps. The juice of the leaves or bark is applied to the skin if contaminated with poison bush. Bahamians rather call it *Gamakmee* or *Kamakmee*. It is an important ingredient in the aphrodisiac bush tea called the "21 gun salute on Cat". It is also called the "tourist tree" because the tourists get burned and peel much like the red peeling bark on this tree!

LIFE LEAF: LIVE FOR EVER (*bryophyllum pinnatum*) - This is a plant which grows profusely in wastelands and even on rock walls. New growth is derived from tiny plants produced in segments of the leaves. It is used in "shortness of breath" and for kidney conditions. The herbal tonic composition improves respiration, aids in the elimination of toxins and improves overall vitality.

LIGNUM VITAE (*guaiacum officinale*) - Commonly referred to as 'ironwood', wood so dense it will not float. In 1700 Lignum Vitae was considered the penicillin of the time. The bark was chiefly used as a cathartic, the fruit as a vegetable and the flower as a laxative. The white juice coming out of the bark was used against a "scald head." Nowadays, it is used as a tea and as a bath for body pains. It is the most versatile native Bahamian plant and referred to as "the tree of life" or as many old folks call it "Nigly Whitey" - the national tree of the Bahamas.

LIME (*citrus aurantifolia*) - The juice of a lime will keep mosquitoes off the body and if applied to a bite relieves the itch.

LOVE VINE, DODDER (*cuscuta americana*) - Used in a bath to sooth the skin from itching and prickly heat. Tied around the waist gives relief from backache. Claims to help in virility. If it is an aphrodisiac you are looking for, then the Love Vine could be the plant for you. Apparently this vine can be found not-so-lovingly attached to other plants, which it eventually kills. As with most of the local remedies, the vine leaves are made into a tea.

MATCH ME IF YOU CAN (*acalypha wilkesiana* var, *macafeana*) -It is said that no two leaves of this plant have the same markings. For rheumatic pains the large leaves are slightly crushed, applied to the affected parts and bound firmly in place. The same is worn on the sole of the shoe as a cure for colds.

MINT BUSH (*Mentha*) - Use as a tea. A proven remedy for stomach pains and to stimulate the body.

PAPAYA (*carica papaya*) - Used as an aid to digestion. The milk or white juice diluted with water and drunk for indigestion. A slice of the green fruit placed on ringworm will make it disappear, along with chiggers. The seeds can be swallowed and are good for ridding the body of worms. The flesh of the fruit and the powdered leaves are used as a meat tenderizer. The meat of the fruit can be applied to an ulcer and left for 24 hours, it will slough off and leave a clean surface. It has been injected into a slipped disc with some success.

PERIWINKLE (*vinca minor, rosea, alba*) -This plant has been used historically throughout the Caribbean to treat a wide assortment of diseases. The juice from the leaves is used to treat wasp stings and other insect bites. The plant can be boiled to make a poultice to stop bleeding. It has been used as an astringent, diuretic and cough remedy. The people believe that due to its effect of destroying white blood cells it is good for the treatment of leukemia.

PIGEON PEA or PLUM (*Cajanus cajan, cocoloba*) - When brewed into a tea it is good to combat diarrhea.

POUND-CAKE BUSH (*parthenium hysterophorus*) - Flowers from spring to autumn. It is used to combat 'weakness', coughs, and as a wash for skin sores. The flowers are sometimes 'parched' (dried) and sprinkled on skin sores. It is made into a tea for diabetics.

ROOSTER COMB, SORE BUSH, SCORPION TAIL (*heliotropium parviflorum*) - Used in the treatment of skin conditions. The leaves are dried and sprinkled on open sores. The leaves and flowers, when dried into a powder are very effective in impetigo and other children's sores.

SALVE BUSH (*solanum verbascifolium*) - The leaves are considered potent medicine for expelling all impurities through the urine. Pound the leaves to make a poultice to treat piles, hemorrhoids and scrofula. Heated leaves are applied as a cream to the forehead for a headache. A tea of the leaves is drunk for vertigo. An infusion of the plant is used for a bath after childbirth. As a tea it is said to be used for coughs, and as a wash calms skin irritations.

SEASIDE MORNING-GLORY, BAY HOP (*ipomoea pescaprae*) - The vine grows profusely on the beaches of the Bahamas. Used for the relief of women's "strain and tiredness."

SHEPHERD'S NEEDLE (*bidens pilosa*) - The foliage and flowers are steeped and used for prickly heat, "cooling the blood" and to relieve "sick stomach". It can be given every day for nine days for worms in children.

SUNFLOWER (*Helianthus annuus*) - Boil a couple of ounces of seeds in a quart of water. Add honey. It is good for coughs and colds.

SUGAR APPLE (*Annona squamosa* L.) - Its edible fruits are applied to contusions as a cataplasm. The leaves can be used as a barbasco, as a poultice for ulcers and boils, and also to kill lice and remove guinea worms. The crushed leaves can be placed under the nostril of a person who has fainted to hasten revival. The seeds are insecticidal.

TRUSH BUSH - Good to clean a baby's tongue.

VIOLET LEAF - Boil the leaves, inhale to ease headache caused by lack of sleep.

YELLOW THISTLE (*argemone mexicana*) - The seed pods secrete a pale yellow latex substance when cut open. The argemone resin contains berberine and portopine which is used medicinally as a sedative.

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