

# FAIRCHILD TROPICAL BOTANIC GARDEN

Exploring, Explaining and Conserving the World of Tropical Plants

## Survivor: South Florida

After teaching your students about some of the uses of different South Florida plants, from the materials provided, divide the class in to two-four “tribes,” depending on the size of your class. They are to pretend there is no “civilization” in South Florida.

- Give each tribe a creative name if you like or use a name of one of South Florida’s American Indian tribes.
- Make a set of ten 3x5 cards for each tribe, with the tribe’s name on one side and the other side blank. You will then ask a series of ten questions, about what plants they would hypothetically use for food, specific illnesses, shelter etc. Ten example questions with answers are listed below (feel free to create some new ones as well). Re-emphasize to your students that this is just a game and they should not actually try to use any of the plants. Emphasize that people spend a long time studying how to safely use plants for medicines and food. If you like, list the names of the plants that they have learned about on the board. Their answers should come from this list.
- Each tribe will have one minute to consult quietly and write what they think is the correct answer on their 3x5 card and hand it in when they are ready.
- Keep score on the board. The tribe with the most correct answers will win the survivor challenge. No one gets voted off, it’s just a fun South Florida survival trivia game!

### Sample questions:

Scenario: It is the 1600s and your tribe is stranded in South Florida. You have to survive, and to do that you must know enough about the local plants so that you can eat, build shelter, and have medicine.

1. Nutrition comes first for the survival of the tribe. What are three plants you can eat, assuming you know how to prepare them all correctly so that no one gets poisoned?

**Answer** - Plants that have edible parts that they should know include:

- Coontie (underground stem or tuber, must be cleaned properly or is toxic)
- Saw palmetto (palm heart and fruit)
- Cabbage palm or sabal palm (palm heart and fruit)
- Prickly pear (Fruit and flesh)
- Lignum vitae (fruit – survival food, must be cooked)
- Black mangrove (Sprouting seeds – survival food, must be cooked, toxic if raw)
- Cocoplum- Edible fruit
- Sea Grape- Edible fruit.



Note: there are a number of other edible plants native to South Florida, including cattails, sea grapes, wild papaya, strangler figs, and red, mulberry. If your students happen to know about any of these and use them as an answer to the question, it could be considered correct, though they should try to stick to what they have learned in class.

2. Where could you get salt to flavor your food (Note: do not answer “the ocean”)?

**Answer** - From the leaves of the black mangrove, which exude salt.

3. If you got poisonwood rash, what would you treat it with?

**Answer** - Gumbo limbo bark or leaves

4. What plant would you turn to if you wanted to go fishing or hunting, to stun the fish or poison your arrows?

**Answer** - Jamaica Dogwood

5. What would you use to make a thatched roof chickee for shelter?

**Answer** - Cabbage Palm

6. You may be a survivalist, but you still want to be clean! Where would you get shampoo when you were ready to wash up?

**Answer** - Juice of the prickly pear

7. There are lots of mosquitoes in the everglades, especially in summer! What is a plant that could be used as insect repellent?

**Answer** - There are two correct answers here: the fruit of the Black Mangrove and/or extract of Jamaica Dogwood.

8. Someone in your tribe has asthma. What might you use to treat it?

**Answer** - There are three correct answers to this:

- Lignum vitae (tea made from leaves)
- Jamaica dogwood (dried root bark)
- Prickly pear (fruit)

Note: of these, only Jamaica dogwood has been tested scientifically and proven to have real medicinal qualities, including anti-spasmodic action. The others may work, but they have not been tested by science. However, any of these three can be considered a correct answer.

9. What wood would you use to make a boat?

**Answer** - Jamaica dogwood is best. If they answer lignum vitae, tell them their boat will sink – lignum vitae wood is denser than water and is one of the few woods that will sink!



10. Bonus question (worth 3 points): A member of your tribe has a fever. What would you use to treat the fever and how would you prepare it?

**Answer** - an infusion of the bark and leaves of the gumbo limbo tree.

