

South Florida Native Plant Uses

Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden does not endorse the use of any of these remedies. Please do not consume and consult a physician before use.

Plant	Leaf characteristics	Flower / fruit characteristics	Other unusual characteristics	Uses (Fairchild Tropical Garden does not guarantee the validity of all of these plant uses)
Allspice (<i>Pimenta officinalis</i>)	Lance shaped, leathery, aromatic	Small, white, aromatic		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dried fruit crushed and used as culinary spice and food preservative; stimulates appetite • Mayans embalmed with it • Jamaicans consider it to be an aphrodisiac • Used in boots to keep feet warm • Plaster (paste) applied to body for rheumatism; anti-inflammatory • Essential oil used for flatulence
Anatto (<i>Bixa orellano</i>)	glossy, ovate leaves are evergreen with reddish veins; they have a round, heart-shaped base and a pointed tip	Flowers are pink, white, or some combination, and are 4 to 6 cm in diameter. Fruits are small capsules covered with red bristles	Substitute for saffron	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaf infusion used as topical antiseptic, to treat hypertension, high cholesterol, and digestive problems • Leaves applied to sprains • Macerated seeds used to tone and balance liver, for skin care (anti-aging), as diuretic, and against high blood pressure • Root used for diabetes • Seed coating used for food coloring and in cosmetics • Insecticidal properties
Bay Rum (<i>Pimenta racemosa</i>)	Dark green, elliptic, smooth edges; fragrant when crushed	White flowers, 1 cm; small black fruits		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaf decoction used for cold, cough, flu, pneumonia • Also for digestive problems, colic, stomachache • Stimulating skin lotion and hair wash • Bark, fruit, and oil used for culinary purposes • Leaf held in mouth used to control smoking urges • Pesticidal properties
Beauty Berry, (<i>Callicarpa americana</i>)	Coarse, fuzzy, light green, ovate, leaves with slightly serrated edges	Small white-pink flowers are less showy than bright purple whorls of fruits, densely clustered in leaf axils	Lovely fruits are very attractive to birds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edible fruits made into jelly • Sweat baths from root and leaves used for edema and malaria • Microbial activity • May help treat skin cancer • Roots boiled to treat dysentery • Roots and berries boiled to treat colic • Bark used to treat itchy skin • Laxative

Plant	Leaf characteristics	Flower / fruit characteristics	Other unusual characteristics	Uses (Fairchild Tropical Garden does not guarantee the validity of all of these plant uses)
Buttonwood (<i>Conocarpus erectus</i>)	Leaves 1-4 in, obovate, ovate or elliptic, smooth green or silky white;	flower heads 1 cm, whitish-green; fruits purplish-green, cone-like	May be green or silver – same species but different varieties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard, heavy, water resistant wood used in naval construction • High quality charcoal; used by pioneers for smoking meat before kerosene was available • Bark extracts used as astringent, to treat bleeding gums, treat colic, and skin ulcers
Cabbage Palm (<i>Sabal palmetto</i>)	Costapalmate leaves (Fan shaped and slightly folded, with arched midrib). Leaf segments slender, the ends are thread-like	Small, white flowers formed in clusters, fragrant. Fruit is black when ripe and round in shape	The trunk is made up of old leaf bases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palm heart made from the terminal bud or “cabbage”. This can be eaten raw or cooked, but it kills the tree. (Commercial heart of palm that you find in the store is harvested from multi-stemmed palms that are not killed). • The fruits are eaten raw when ripe and are said to taste prune-like, or are made into syrup • Native Americans reduced the dried fruits to a coarse meal, which they used to make bread • Leaves used to make thatch roofs for chickie huts
Cocoplum (<i>Chrysobalanus icaco</i>)	Alternate, leathery, broadly elliptic to obovate, 4-8 cm	Small cream flowers on raceme; round fruit, to 4 cm, red-purple		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bark is astringent; used for diarrhea and dysentery • May also be used as anti-diabetic and for hypoglycemia • Wood used for torches; oil used for candles and soap • Fruit is edible
Coontie (<i>Zamia pumila</i>)	Compound pinnate leaves, up to 3 feet long, leaflets narrow (less than 1/4 in wide), curving upward	Male plants: narrow cylindrical cones, up to 7 in. long. Female plants: thick ellipsoid cone, up to 7 in long, with orange or red seeds	Is a gymnosperm, contains toxins (steroid-like); host plant for atala butterfly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used for food - the thick underground stem was made into starch, though it is poisonous - cycasin (a poisonous substance) had to be removed first by washing • Poultice used to absorb poisons from arrow wounds

Plant	Leaf characteristics	Flower / fruit characteristics	Other unusual characteristics	Uses (Fairchild Tropical Garden does not guarantee the validity of all of these plant uses)
Gumbo Limbo (<i>Bursera simaruba</i>)	Compound pinnate, opposite, with terminal leaflet	Small, greenish yellow flowers	Peeling reddish bark One of most widely used plants in Caribbean, with hundreds of common names	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bark and leaves are antidote to poison wood, relief of rashes, stings, burns, and sprains • Tea from bark used to treat fever, low blood pressure, UTI, colds and flu, fever, and as a blood purifier • Resin used by Native Americans for incense (copal); also antiseptic and anti-diarrhetic • Sap used as sticky glue spread on branches to trap songbirds in 1800's
Jamaica Dogwood (<i>Piscidia piscipula</i>)	Pinnate leaves with seven leaflets, each 5 to 10 cm. (2 to 4 in.) long	Pink to lavender pea flowers in clusters. The seed pods have 4 papery wings and are each 7 cm (3 in) long		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bark or leaves have been crushed and used to relieve pain • The dried root bark has been used to treat neuralgia, insomnia, cough, fever, hysteria, toothaches, asthma, and inflammation. • The bruised twigs and leaves of this plant were used by indigenous people to stun fish • The fruits were used for arrow poison when hunting • Extracts of the plant have been found to be effective natural pesticides • Wood used for boats
Lignum Vitae (<i>Guaicum sanctum</i>)	Small, compound pinnate leaves with oval leaflets, no terminal leaflet	Deep-blue to purple fragrant flowers, yellow fruit pod	Very hard, dense wood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used medicinally in the Caribbean for fighting swollen glands and fever; syphilis, skin disease, toothache, and gout • First 'penicillin' • In Jamaica the resin soaked in rum is used as gargle for sore throats and cuts and bruises • The wood is highly valued for its strength and durability
Live Oak, (<i>Quercus virginiana</i>)	Elliptical shaped leaves are stiff and leathery, 2-4 inches long, wavy margin, dull green underside	Brown inconspicuous flowers; Fruits (acorns) less than 1 inch.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sacred meaning in several cultures, represents strength • Wood for construction, boats • Dye and paint from wood (red) • Oil from acorns • Decoction of bark used as an astringent and analgesic to treat aches and pains, sores, dysentery, and hemorrhoids • antiviral, antiseptic, anti-tumor • mulch of the leaves repels slugs and grubs • Galls on tree can be used as tannin, dye, or to treat hemorrhage, chronic diarrhea, and dysentery

Plant	Leaf characteristics	Flower / fruit characteristics	Other unusual characteristics	Uses (Fairchild Tropical Garden does not guarantee the validity of all of these plant uses)
Mangrove , black (<i>Avicennia germinans</i>)	Opposite leaves, very thick, almost leathery, often exuding salt	White flowers with what looks like four petals. Fruit is a flattened, fleshy green pod	The roots commonly send up many pencil-sized pneumatophores (roots that stick up from under the water)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sprouting seeds are edible if cooked, though can be toxic if raw • Wood for charcoal • Bark used for dye and tanning • Salt on leaves can be collected and consumed. • Medicinal – rheumatic pain, astringent, poison and insect repellent
Mangrove, Red (<i>Rhizophora mangle</i>)	Opposite, elliptic, dark and shiny, to 12 cm	Yellow flower inflorescence, 1.5 cm; fruit brown leathery, 3 cm long, germinate on tree		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bark used for tanning • Wood for construction and tools, fuel • Dye from bark and young shoots • Cord, fiber • Counters diarrhea, hemorrhage, dysentery, fever, sore throat, angina, asthma, diarrhea, convulsions, fever, inflammation, jaundice, leprosy, lesions, and syphilis • antibacterial, antifungal, boosts immunity, insecticidal • Fijian people drink the tea to treat the common cold. • Has been used as an astringent, expectorant
Mangrove, white (<i>Laguncularia racemosa</i>)	Oblong-oval, round on ends, or notched apex, light green, 1.5 – 3 in, smooth, have 2 glands at base of leaf stalk	Spikes of whitish flowers, 1/8 in, fuzzy; fruits ½ in, green, diamond shape	Bark gives name 'white'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wood used as fuel • Tannins in bark used to cure skin disease, dysentery, and tumors

Plant	Leaf characteristics	Flower / fruit characteristics	Other unusual characteristics	Uses (Fairchild Tropical Garden does not guarantee the validity of all of these plant uses)
Paradise Tree (<i>Simarouba glauca</i>)	Compound leaves, narrow, oblong, 2-4 inches, pale green underside	Yellow flowers in terminal stalks; fruits mature from red to purple to black		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wood used to make matches and fuel • Anti-malarial • Used topically as plaster for body pain • Seeds yield oil used commercially in Central America • Leaf or bark infusions used as astringent, digestive aid, menstrual stimulant, and to treat parasites. • Taken internally to treat malaria, diarrhea, dysentery, colitis • Used externally on wounds and sores • Toxic in large quantities
Prickly Pear (<i>Opuntia dillenii</i>)	Flat, fleshy, succulent stems with leaves modified into spines	Large, 2 inch yellow to orange flowers with many tepals; pear shaped red to purple fruit with many seeds		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit and pads are edible • Tea from pads used to treat inflammation • Flesh cooked and used for boils, splinters, tumors, and arthritis • Anti-diabetic, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, hypoglycemic, antiviral, anti-oxidant • Used to treat sore throat, hyperglycemia, benign prostate hyperplasia, alcohol hangover, acidosis, arteriosclerosis, diabetes, problems of the urinary system in women, virginities, and eye inflammation • Said to help reduce weight, regulate blood sugar, increase fiber intake, and used to treat asthma, fatigue and liver injury. • Root crushed in water and drunk for urinary burning • Flowers used to treat diarrhea • Baked fruit used for asthma, liver congestion, whooping cough • Juice extract from pads can be used as shampoo • Applied to breasts to promote milk flow • The pulp of the pads has been used by many cultures as a dressing for burns, cuts, wounds, and fractures and is believed to deaden pain and promote healing. • Glochids from the plant were rubbed into warts and moles to assist in their removal

Plant	Leaf characteristics	Flower / fruit characteristics	Other unusual characteristics	Uses (Fairchild Tropical Garden does not guarantee the validity of all of these plant uses)
Saw Palmetto (<i>Serenoa repens</i>)	Palmate leaves (fan shaped), stiff with serrated edges on leaf stalk	White flowers bloom in clusters, fragrant. Fruit is black when ripe and oblong in shape	Main stem crawls along ground and can form new plants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known to affect hormones, used for treatment of benign prostate hyperplasia (enlarged prostate), UTI, treating hair loss and infertility in both sexes • Fruit and palm heart (terminal bud) are used for food • Used as a cork substitute and for wallboard • Leaves used to make small fans • Treats respiratory and nervous problems, snake and insect bites • Acts as diuretic, aphrodisiac, and eyewash
Sea Grape (<i>Coccoloba uvifera</i>)	Alternate, saucer-shape, leathery, prominent veins, glossy and reddish when young, 8-20 cm	Inflorescence 15-30 cm, small cream colored flowers; fruit red-purple clusters		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bark or wood used as gargle for throat infections • Treats fever, diarrhea • Used as astringent • Tanning, dyeing cotton • Wood, bark, and root decoction used for dysentery, hemorrhage, venereal disease • Applied externally for rashes • Decoction of leaves used to treat asthma and to wash wounds.
Strangler Fig (<i>Ficus aurea</i>)	Elliptical to ovate, 2-6 in	Flowers small and inconspicuous; fruits red to yellow spheres, ¼ to ¾ inch, unstalked		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wood used for arrows and bows • Aerial roots for cord, making arrows, bowstrings, lashings, and fishing lines • Latex used in chewing gum and as glue • Treats wounds and cuts, heart problems, hernia • Fruit used to make dye
White Indigoberry (<i>Randia aculeata</i>)	Obovate, narrow at base, 1-2 in, in clusters	At base of leaves, ¼ in, white, tubular, fragrant; fruits ovoid, ½ in, white outside, blue-black flesh		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruits used as astringent • Treats dysentery • Fruits used for blue dye • Used as Christmas trees in Puerto Rico • Stems used for fishing poles

Plant	Leaf characteristics	Flower / fruit characteristics	Other unusual characteristics	Uses (Fairchild Tropical Garden does not guarantee the validity of all of these plant uses)
Wild Coffee (<i>Psychotria nervosa</i>)	Elliptical to oblong, deep veined, glossy dark green, 2-4 in	White flowers 1/8 inch; berries 3/8 inch, red when ripe		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crushed leaves stop bleeding • Root used as emetic • Leaf as febrifuge, remedy for colds and stomach ailments, anemia, boils and sores, hemorrhage, and antifungal
Wild Tamarind (<i>Lysiloma latisliqua</i>)	Bi-pinnately compound leaves; leaflets less than 2 inches	Small white globular flowers inconspicuous but fragrant; flat brown seed pods, 4-6 in		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wood used for boats, cabinetry • Tanning • Treats fever, gum and tooth problems, sores and rash, • Acts as antimicrobial and stops bleeding
White Stopper (<i>Eugenia axillariis</i>)	Oval leaves emerge red turning to green, less than 2 in	Small creamy white flowers with many yellow stamens; red-black fruits less than 1/2 in		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treats diarrhea, colds • Builds blood and boosts energy • Used after childbirth as a bath and as an aphrodisiac • Wood used for bows, rods, ramrods for guns • Used as Roof rafters and animal traps