



Bermuda Botanical Society

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APRIL NEWSLETTER 2016 FROM THE EDITOR

What a glorious spring we're having! The Ag. Show was back (isn't it a relief to return to "the Ag. Show" instead of "the Annual Exhibition"? Or am I just old-fashioned?) and it was a smash hit. Gardens and wastelands are blooming with colour: if nothing else, nasturtiums luxuriate in covering unsightly piles of branches or rocky hillsides.



In my garden, the native Coast Sophora (*Sophora tomentosa*) is full of seed-pods, but there is still one flowering spike, and some Bermuda Snowberries (*Chiococca bermudiana*) still gleam white among their glossy leaves, although most have fallen.



Also, peaches are growing! The smallest of my three trees has the most fruit ... so far. Let's hope there are no storms to bring them all down!



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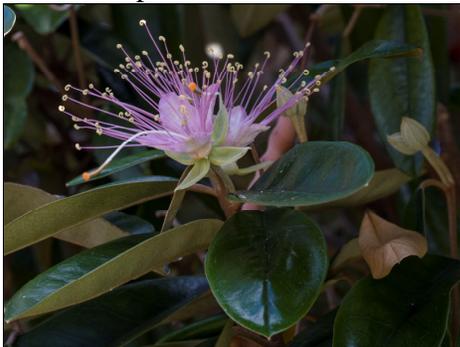
FROM LISA GREENE

Hamilton Walking tour - Follow-up on the Jamaica caper tree:

During the January walk, I mentioned that I'd seen a photo of the caper tree and that it did not reach the roof of the building that is now the Post Office. Here is a link to that photograph – taken in 1886:
http://lcpdams.librarycompany.org:8881/R/?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=142851&local_base=GEN01

The caper tree is native to the neotropics which includes the [tropical terrestrial ecoregions](#) of the [Americas](#) and the entire [South American temperate](#) zone.

Info from Lyn Vaughan – “The Bermuda tree at QE II Park was sent to William Benet Perot in 1843 from Demerara (now part of Guyana) by his son, Adolphus.”



Flower



Fruit



Caper tree leaf before it splits.



A spider flower, By K Hari Krishnan (right)

Spider flower is in the same family as the Jamaica caper tree: Capparaceae – the caper family. You can see the similarity between the two species – particularly the long stamens.

April Botanical Gardens Walking Tour – follow-up:

Tree bark:

“From its first year right up to the death of the tree, bark undergoes a long development that changes it through the years. The bark is transformed by the growth of the trunk. This adulteration is conditioned by the internal state and age of the tree itself, the composition and quality of the soil, the moisture regime, the climate, the amount of sunshine, the geographical site and elevation, the local environment (whether in a forest or standing alone), disease, and the influence of animals and of the microflora.” Excerpted from “Tree Bark, a colour guide,” by Hugues Vaucher.

I wonder if that’s another way of saying that bark, even within a species, is variable?

I know that I’m going to be looking more closely and comparing the bark of different examples of the same species as well as comparing the bark of trees within the same family. Perhaps you will as well.

Here are some photographs of the bark of three of the trees we saw on the walk:

Avocado – *Persea americana* (Lauraceae – the laurel family) Shallowly cracked with irregular scales. This tree in the Montrose Orchard might be the oldest avocado in Bermuda.



Camphor tree – *Cinnamomum camphora* (Lauraceae – the laurel family) Bark divided into rectangular blocks by deep fissures, thick and hard.



Hackberry – *Celtis laevigata* (Hackberry used to be in the elm family but botanists have now put in Cannabaceae – the dagga family.) Hackberry is a smaller tree, growing from thirty five to fifty feet in Bermuda. Its bark is gray to light brown; look closely and you’ll see patches of distinguishing bumps that look like warts. The asymmetrical, thin leaves are two to four inches long, pointed at the tip, and are held on drooping branches. The twigs, which tend to zigzag, have red-brown bark speckled with lighter bumps which are, in fact, lenticels - areas of loosely packed cells that allow oxygen and carbon dioxide to move into and out of the tree. They may be an adaptation that helps the plant survive in wet soils where submerged roots are unable to “breath”. (In North America it grows on river flood plains.) Another plant in Bermuda with lenticels is the red mangrove; the lenticels are the little bumps on the above-water portion of the prop roots.



What barks have you noticed? Take a photo and post it to the Bermuda Botanical Society’s Facebook page.

HEDYCHIUM FAMILY ZINGIBARACEAE

FROM WIKIPEDIA (BY MARIJKE PETERICH)

Hedychium is a [genus](#) of [flowering plants](#) in the ginger [family](#) Zingiberaceae, [native](#) to lightly wooded habitats in Asia. There are approximately 70-80 known species, native to [Southeast Asia](#) ([Thailand](#), [Malaysia](#), [Indonesia](#), the [Philippines](#), etc.), southern [China](#), the [Himalayas](#) and [Madagascar](#). Some species have become widely naturalized in other lands ([South Africa](#), [South America](#), [Central America](#), the [West Indies](#), and many of the islands of the [Pacific](#), [Indian](#) and [Atlantic](#)

[Oceans](#)) and considered invasive in some places.^{[1][2]}

The genus name *Hedychium* is derived from two ancient Greek words, *hedys* meaning "sweet" and *chios* meaning "snow". This refers to the fragrant white flower of the type species [H. coronarium](#).^[3] [Common names](#) include **garland flower**, **ginger lily**, and **kahili ginger**.

Members of the genus *Hedychium* are rhizomatous perennials, commonly growing 120–180 cm (47–71 in) tall. Some species are cultivated for their exotic foliage and fragrant spikes of flowers in shades of white, yellow and orange.^[4] Numerous cultivars have been developed for garden use, of which 'Tara' has gained the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit.^[5]

Alpinia purpurata, Red ginger



From Bermuda: A Gardener's Guide

This grows about 4ft. In Bermuda with an floescence consisting of bright red bracts each with a small white flower. It requires partial shade and protection from severe weather. May be grown as a potted plant. Propagate by division.

Alpinia zerumbet (Shell Ginger)



A rhizomatous plant to 10ft. (3 m) in height, forming large clumps which can become very invasive. Fragrant waxy, shell like flowers, white flushed with pink and tipped with a lip of red and yellow are produced on spikes above the leaves in spring. Propagate by division. China and Japan.

Alpinia zerumbet 'variegata'. This plant has striking leaves which are dark green, variegated with bands of creamy yellow



Other species of ginger include: Hedychium coronarium (White Ginger Lily)



...and Hedychium var. 'Tara'



Trivium 16: By George



This poppy is not the one from the battlefields of WWI (that I wrote about a year ago) It is the source of opium. It grows in the wild in Bermuda. One of its common names is just “opium poppy” Is it *Papaver opiaticum*, or what other epitheton would be the right one?

hypnophorum, soporificum, somniferum, or hypnoticum?

(Answer Page 8)

SCARLET CORDIA

BY GEORGE PETERICH

The Botanical Society recently organized a guided walk through Hamilton. It took place on the last Sunday of January and I was one of the guides, with the task to talk about the trees in Reid Street. Readers of the BBC news-letter may remember an article that I wrote about that, so I came quite prepared. However I still did a bit of research. Looking up the Scarlet Cordia (*Cordia sebestina*) which is prominent in parts of the street. I first found that Cordia got its name from two German botanists by the name of Cordus, who lived in the late 15th and early 16th century. “sebestina” refers to Sebesten, a plant with similar fruits.

But then I found that in 1832 John James Audubon, the famous bird painter (and shooter) saw the tree in Key West in the garden of a famous local, Captain John H. Geiger, which is why the tree is now still called Geiger Tree. Audubon described it as follows:
“The Rough-leaved Cordia

This plant, on account of its large tubular scarlet flowers, is one of the most beautiful of the West Indian trees. I saw only two individuals at Key West, where we supposed, they had been introduced from Cuba. They were about fifteen feet high, the stem having a diameter of only five or six inches. They were in full bloom in the early part of May, and their broad deep green leaves, and splendid red blossoms, mingled with the variety of plants around me, rendered their appearance delightful. Both trees were on private property, and grew in a yard opposite to that of Dr. Strobel, through whose influence I procured a large bough, from which the drawing was made, with assistance of Mr. Lehman. I was informed that they continue to flower nearly the whole summer.”

The drawing in question is one of the most beautiful in Audubon’s famous “Birds of America”: two White Crowned Pigeons in the branches of a Scarlet Cordia.



If you would like to take a look at the other birds and plants in Audubon’s book, there is an edition of smaller copies, two volumes, in the library at BAMZ. Be sure to ask for it before you go, because the books are “in the vaults”.

OBITUS OLEAE
DEATH OF THE OLIVE TREE
BY GEORGE PETERICH

It is with immense sadness, that I have to report the death of the oldest tree in the Botanical Gardens: the Olive Tree (*Olea europea*) that stood to the North of the Sensory Garden. On the first of April I came to the spot where it had been, when I took some tourists on what was my first guided tour of the season. It was such a shock to me that I almost cried; at least I had to swallow hard to be able to continue my tour with the required “All-is beautiful” attitude. Yes, it was very difficult to keep talking happily and I must confess that I made a few unpleasant observations.

Our Olive Tree may have had a few weak spots, but generally the tree was healthy. The stump of the tree does not show that it was on its way out. Any firm-rooted tree, with just one third of its trunk healthy, can survive; with olive trees perhaps one sixth or one eighth will suffice. I want to make the point that we are not talking about the death of a tree but about a murder. This was not a small mistake – it was a big one and it is even difficult to assume that it was a mistake indeed.

On the 10th of April I was in the Garden again with a small group of botany enthusiasts and experts from the Bermuda Botanical Society to discuss a few tree families. Quite a few of them were shocked when they saw the open space and the stump, where the tree had been.

This landmark tree was a highlight on my guided tours through the Park, and I always made a stop under its shade. It was a good place to talk about our subtropical or Mediterranean climate. The tree was not pollarded, as is the case with olive trees that are kept for the production of olives, and a lot could be told about that too. One interesting item is that the trees bear more flowers on young twigs, which is of course stimulated by the pollarding.

Our tree had only been cut back once because a branch put a corner of the sensory garden in the shade, and again when a branch had broken off. Often large parts of the crown were leafless, especially after storms. It was because the tree got much wind, with its unusual height. Even so a lot of the foliage always remained, and green twigs always sprouted where you would not have expected it. But generally it was left untouched, although it did not look too good at times. Olive trees can literally live thousands of years, and the older they get the more characteristic is their trunk. Our tree was a real showcase for that. It will be missed forever.

Obiit olea, miserabile dictu

Answer to Trivium #16: *Somniferum*, Latin for “sleep bringing”. (*hypnophorum* is funny because it is the Greek translation of that)

POSTSCRIPT

BY HELLE PATTERSON

This month we had a well-attended and most informative tour of an assortment of trees and shrubs in the Botanical Gardens, led by several members of the Society.

Among the things I learnt: the lichen which is appearing on a number of trees (including the frangipani in my garden) is an indication that the tree is ailing. The lichen should be removed (Peter Lee advises a wipe down with soapy water) and the cause of the tree's distress investigated. Far too many trees in the Botanical Gardens are covered in lichen ...

Lisa Greene recommends in her article earlier in this newsletter that we all pay more attention to tree bark. During our tour of the Botanical Gardens when we came to the Southern Hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*) we observed some unusual marks on the bark:



These intriguing holes are made by sapsuckers. I didn't know anything about sapsuckers, but the Bermuda Audubon Society webpage tells me they're Yellow-Bellied Sapsuckers.

And a challenge to end with:

Can you identify the following picture? Send your answers by email to helle@transact.bm
Answer (and winner) announced in August newsletter.



UPCOMING EVENTS

We are in the process of setting up some talks and walks, including PALMS
by George Ogden in May.

Please watch out for emails sending details once we have confirmation.