

Agricultural Roots on St. Martin



an Amuseum Companion

Learn about native fruits, traditional Amerindian crops and
the African influence on Caribbean agriculture.

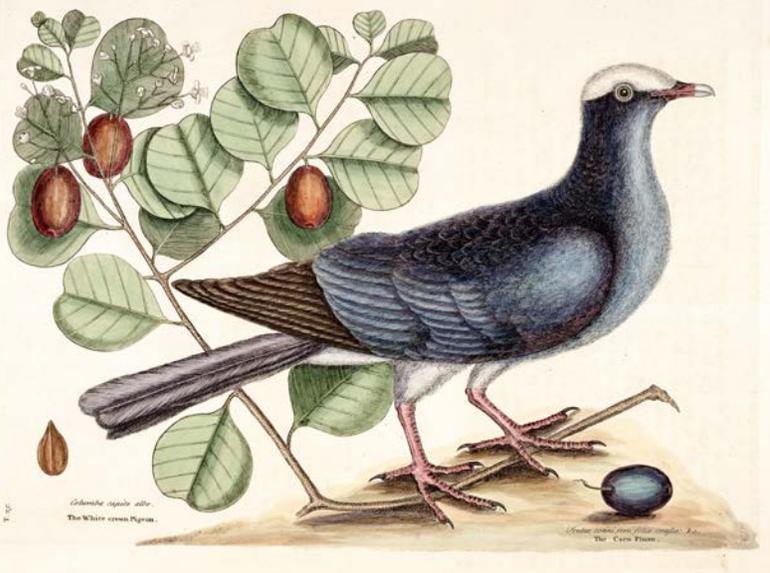


FRUITS OF THE LAND

Original flavors of St. Martin

The first foods on St. Martin were here long before the first people. Many different native fruits were already part of the landscape when the first people came. Before the first people, these fruits were food for native birds and other animals. We can thank the birds for eating these fruits and then spreading the seeds from island to island.

*Above: Guava (*Psidium guajava*) painted by Marianne North in Jamaica, 1872.*



The Coco Plum (*Chrysobalanus icaco*) is seen here with the White-crowned Pigeon (*Patagioenas leucocephala*), a Caribbean bird that eats the fruit and spreads the seeds of many native trees. (Illustration by Mark Catesby)

Sea Grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*) and Coco Plum (*Chrysobalanus icaco*) are often found near the sea, and still grow wild near many of our beaches. Guava (*Psidium guajava*) and Guavaberry (*Myrciaria floribunda*) do well in valleys with rich soil and plenty of water. Soursop (*Annona muricata*) and Sugar Apple (*Annona squamosa*) were once planted in every backyard.

Today, some native fruits, like the Water Lemon (*Passiflora laurifolia*), are rarely seen. Sea Grapes are still loved for their shade and beauty, but not everyone knows of their delicious fruit. Over the years, many new, non-native fruits like mango, banana and kinnip

The Sugar Apple (*Annona squamosa*) is also called Sweet Sop and Custard Apple.





became local favorites after they were brought to St. Martin from other parts of the world. Other native fruits still have a strong place in local diet and culture. Guavaberry is a favorite flavor for rum, jam and tarts eaten at Christmas time. Soursop trees are still found beside many houses. Their fruit are enjoyed as juice, smoothies or sorbet and their leaves are used as a bush tea.

The Sea Grape (Coccoloba uvifera) is a popular seaside tree that is used today for shade. Its fruit is loved by some, but perhaps not as much as in the past.



ANNONA MURICATA L.

Soursop (Annona muricata) gets its name from the sweet and sour taste of its fruit. The fruit is loved throughout the Caribbean and has also been brought to Asia and Africa. On St. Martin, the fruit and its juice are both popular. Soursop is also used as bush medicine. The fruit and leaves are used to treat dozens of conditions, from fever to bedwetting. On St. Martin, tea made from a few Soursop leaves steeped in boiled water is taken before bed for better sleep. (Illustration by Berthe Hoola van Nooten)



The Water Lemon (*Passiflora laurifolia*) is a close relative of the Passion Fruit (*Passiflora edulis*). Both plants are vines with beautiful flowers. The fruit of the Water Lemon is oval-shaped, and soft and fuzzy on the outside. Inside, the fruit looks like a Passion Fruit, with edible seeds in sweet, juicy pulp. Though delicious, they are not widely grown. Leaves of the Water Lemon are eaten by caterpillars of the Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*), a medium-sized, bright orange butterfly. (Illustration by Maria Sibylla Merian)



AMERINDIAN GARDENS

The roots of Caribbean farming

Amerindian people brought a variety of food crops to the Caribbean. Some of them have been grown on the islands for thousands of years. These crops are not as familiar as export crops like sugar or cotton, but they have fed countless generations of Caribbean people.

Above: Pumpkin (Cucurbita moschata), painted by an unknown illustrator.



*Sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), painted by an unknown illustrator in 1846.*

Cassava was the main crop for Amerindians in the Caribbean. It is a root vegetable from South America, and it has several features that make it valuable here. It is a very reliable crop that can produce food even in poor soil or drought. Once planted, it can grow without additional care. Bitter Cassava is high in cyanide and must be prepared carefully, but also resists pests. Cassava bread can stay good for months.

Many other important Amerindian crops were root vegetables, like Sweet Potato, Tannia and Arrowroot. Root vegetables can be left in the ground and harvested when needed. This is life-saving in times of drought, or when a hurricane destroys above-ground crops. These roots were often grown in mounds of soil, a practice that is still used today.

Although many new crops arrived during the colonial period, these ancient root crops are still grown throughout the Caribbean. Beans, Pumpkin, Corn and other crops grown by Amerindians are also found in most gardens and farms. To this day, the crops and techniques of Amerindian farmers are still feeding Caribbean people.



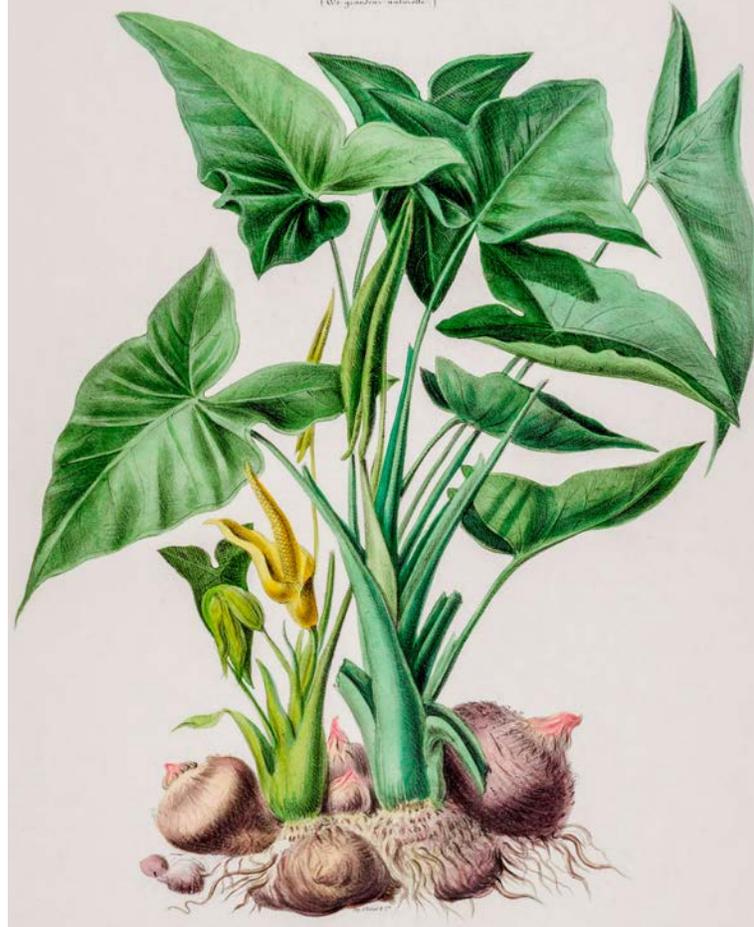
Cassava (*Manihot esculenta*), illustrated by Jean-Theodore Descourtilz in 1827.



Arrowroot (*Maranta arundinacea*), illustrated by an unknown artist in 1808.



Bananas and plantains are both from the genus *Musa*. Most bananas and plantains cultivated are from a hybrid known as *Musa* × *paradisiaca*.



LE MALANGA
dit Choux - Caraïbe.

Les feuilles et les racines de cette plante sont mangibles, les tubercules ont un goût plus délicat que les pommes de terre.

Tannia (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium*) is a starchy root vegetable, and its leaves are also edible.



A NEW HOME

African crops in the Caribbean

Caribbean farming is a unique combination of plants and techniques from two main sources: Caribbean Amerindians and Africans. This unique combination of traditions can be found in Caribbean farms and gardens all over the region today.

*Above: The Watermelon (*Citrullus lanatus*) comes from Africa and is still wildly popular all over the world.*



HOUQUÉ SORGHÔ.

Under slavery, the language, culture and identity of enslaved Africans were deliberately suppressed. But some food and farming traditions have survived through the ages. In their few free hours, enslaved people farmed provision grounds to feed themselves, and this kept farming traditions alive.

Many key crops were brought from Africa. Guinea Corn, or Sorghum, is an African grain. It grows quickly, even in heat and dry weather. Unlike most grains, it is ideal for St. Martin's climate. It is also easy to raise and prepare.

The Pigeon Pea came from Asia, but was popular in Africa by the time St. Martin was colonized. It also grows easily in dry tropical climates. Using a row of Pigeon Pea bushes to mark the edge of a farm or property is a tradition in both Africa and the Caribbean. You can still see this on St. Martin.

Other African crops were soon growing side-by-side with Amerindian ones: African yams, gourds, peas and melons joined Amerindian sweet potatoes, pumpkins and beans. The African technique of ridging soil and the short-handled hoe from Africa are widely used in the region. To this day, farms and gardens on every island show the combined influence of African and Amerindian farming traditions.

Guinea Corn (Sorghum bicolor) can be prepared in many ways. The grains can even be popped like popcorn. Illustrated by Jean-Theodore Descourtilz, 1829.



White Yam (*Dioscorea cayennensis*) from Africa is often grown side by side with Amerindian sweet potatoes.



The Pigeon Pea (*Cajanus cajan*) is a key part of St. Martin cuisine, particularly rice and peas. The plant is very well adapted to the dry tropical climate of St. Martin and can be seen in many yards and gardens. The peas are often harvested around the end of the year. Originally from Asia, this plant was brought to the Caribbean from Africa. The pigeon pea is also an important ingredient in many Indian dishes.



DOLIC A LONGUES GOUSSES

The Cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata*) was domesticated in Africa and is thought to be one of the world's most ancient crops. It has been bred into many varieties, like the black-eyed pea and yardlong bean.



Akeasia Affricanae.

The Ackee (*Blighia sapida*) comes from tropical West Africa, where it is called *akye fufo* in the Akan language. It arrived in the Caribbean in the 1700s, possibly brought across the Atlantic by enslaved Africans. It is particularly popular in Jamaica, where it is the national fruit and part of the national dish: ackee and salt fish. Ackee can only be harvested when the fruits open, because the unripe fruit is very toxic.



This book was developed as a companion to Amuseum Naturalis, St. Martin's free museum of nature, heritage and culture. The Amuseum, and this book, were created by Les Fruits de Mer.

Les Fruits de Mer is a non-profit association based in St. Martin whose core mission is to raise awareness about nature, culture, and heritage. The organization carries out this mission through a free museum, publications, films, and public events. Learn more at lesfruitsdemer.com and amuseumnaturalis.com.

