

Cayman Islands Plants to Beware of

on trails, in woodlands, open areas and roadsides.

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Cayman Islands Native (Indigenous) Species Definition

A Cayman Islands native species is one that occurs naturally in the Cayman Islands without direct or indirect human actions. Some plants and animals are native to only one or two of the three Cayman Islands.

Some plants & animals have been introduced & become *naturalized*, they survive in the wild. If they are not native (indigenous), they will be noted as naturalized.

Cayman common names are almost always different than those used for the same plant when it occurs in other countries.

Fruit – could be a berry (many seeds), drupe (one central stony seed), capsule, pod etc. It does not necessarily mean an edible fruit for humans, but may be for birds.

Maiden Plum

Comocladia dentata

Mango Family: 79 ANACARDIACEAE

Cayman Islands;

Cuba & Hispaniola

LOOK, DON'T TOUCH !
LOOK, DON'T TOUCH !

Learn to recognize and **AVOID TOUCHING** this very common slender shrub or small tree, often unbranched. It has distinctive, shiny, dark-green compound leaves, with 11-17 tooth-edged leaflets. Many tiny dark red flowers are borne in Feb. – March, and fruits in April. When land is cleared or the forest/woodland canopy removed, even partially, Maiden Plum may quickly proliferate. It can predominate in pastures, old fields and the edges of trails, where sunlight has been let in. Its **caustic, acrid-smelling sap** turns blackish on exposure to the air. After contact, most people have an allergic skin reaction. Itching usually starts **24 hours later**. Scratching can spread the allergy to another area. To prevent this, apply 1% Hydrocortisone cream, take an anti-histamine (& Acetaminophen etc). Different remedies work with different people. It clears up in about 10 days.

Bahama Nightshade

Solanum bahamense

Nightshade / Potato Family: 94 SOLANACEAE

Cayman Islands

Florida, & Greater Antilles, except Puerto Rico

Even the leaves of this **spiny** little shrub have spines on them. The petals are blue-violet or white, and the berries, bright red.

Manchineel

Hippomane mancinella

Euphorb Family: 73 EUPHORBIACEAE

Cayman Islands, Endangered;

Florida, West Indies & continental tropical America

Poisonous sap and small apple-like fruits.

Do not stand under a Manchineel tree when it's raining.

The leaves of this tree resemble the rarer (*Ficus citrifolia*) of the two Wild Fig trees (*Ficus aurea*) that occur in the Cayman Islands.

Manchineel leaves have a long leaf-stalk;

there is a tiny gland where it joins the leaf blade.

Lady Hair

Malpighia cubensis

Malpighia Family: 86 MALPIGHIACEAE

Grand Cayman, Endangered;

Cuba

Pretty-looking shrub, the light green leaves have **sharp, needle-like hairs**.

White or pale pink flowers & red fruits.

Poison Wood, Poison Tree

Metopium toxiferum

Family: 79 ANACARDIACEAE

Little Cayman, Endangered;

Florida, Bahamas, Cuba, Hispaniola & Puerto Rico Mango

(No Picture)

Poisonous sap

Tree, compound leaf with 3-7 stalked leaflets. Thin reddish-brown bark, which sheds, showing orange beneath. Orange-yellow fruits.

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Shake Hand Tree

Xylosma bahamense

Willow Family: 47 SALICAEAE (formerly FLACOURTIACEAE)

Grand Cayman, **Endangered**; Northern Bahamas

Do not grab on to the trunk of a Shake Hand tree, when walking over rocky terrain, because the **sharp, branched spines** will cause you to shake your hand in pain!

The glossy dark green leaves are tiny.

Male & female flowers, rarely seen, grow on separate trees.

Shake Hand Tree

Zanthoxylum coriaceum

Citrus Family: 81 RUTACEAE

Cayman Islands, **Critically Endangered**; Florida, Bahamas, Cuba & Hispaniola

This shrub or small tree has shiny, dark green, leathery compound leaves with spines on them. The trunk has **spines** which become knobbly as the plant ages.

Cow Itch

Mucuna pruriens

Pea & Bean Family: 60 FABACEAE

Grand Cayman – naturalized; pantropical

A herbaceous vine that grows over other vegetation. The distinctive compound leaf has 3 leaflets, the mid-veins of the 2 side leaflets are off-center. Flowers are a dull dark purple. The **velvety-brown seed pods** are covered with **stinging hairs** which cause intense itching. They cannot be washed off.

Applying flour to the affected area relieves the itching.

Vine Pear Cactus

Selenicereus grandiflorus

Cactus Family: 34 CACTACEAE

Grand Cayman; Cuba & Jamaica

Very common snake-like trailing or climbing vine with **needle-like spines**.

Showy, large white flowers bloom at night.

Gloves protect your hands from this tree-climbing shake-hand cactus.

Licorice, John Crow Bead,

Rosary Pea, Crab's Eyes – US

Abrus precatorius

Pea & Bean Family: 60 FABACEAE (LEGUMINOSAE)

Cayman Islands – naturalized; pantropical

The **roots** contain *glycerrhizin*, which also occurs in commercial **licorice**.

The **seeds, scarlet** with black spot, contain *abrin* & are **extremely poisonous**. The poison acts only through the **blood stream**, a small amount introduced into a wound could be fatal. However, it is destroyed by digestive juices and by boiling.

The seeds were used to make jewelry and as weights by jewel merchants,

2 seeds = 1 carat (1 carat weighs 1/24 oz.)

Wire Wisp

Smilax havanensis

Greenbrier or Sarsparilla

Family: 18 SMILACACEAE

Grand Cayman; Florida, Bahamas, Cuba & Hispaniola

Slender trailing or climbing vine usually with **hooked prickles** on the stem & leathery leaves. It can catch on your clothes or wrap around your legs.

Itching Vine

Tragia volubilis

Euphorb Family: 73 EUPHORBIACEAE

Grand Cayman; Greater & Lesser Antilles, Central & South America

Slender vine with **stinging hairs**.

(Unlikely to be encountered.)

Cockspur, Gray Nickel, Nickers (the seeds)

Caesalpinia bonduc

Pea & Bean Family: 60 FABACEAE

Cayman Islands; pantropical

Very prickly, sprawling shrub, flowers yellow & prickly seed pods dark brown. The seeds, although used for children's games, are said to be **poisonous**, although **when roasted** & ground they were used like coffee.

Abrus precatorius
Licorice, John Crow Bead,
Rosary Pea, Crab's Eyes – US
Family: FABACEAE (LEGUMINOSAE)

Pantropical, in thickets and woodlands, usually near sea-level. The roots allegedly contain glycerhizin, the same substance as is found in commercial licorice. There are conflicting reports in the literature about the use of this material as a substitute for true licorice. The seeds, on the other hand, are known to be extremely poisonous if eaten; however, they are often used to make bracelets, necklaces and other ornaments, and have been much used in some Asian countries as weight by jewel merchants. The unit of weight called the "carat" (one twenty-fourth of an ounce) is said to have been associated with the weight of Abrus seeds, 2 seeds allegedly weighing 1 carat.

FLORA OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS Proctor p.445.

The small red and black seed contains a protein poison which acts only through the blood stream and is destroyed by digestive juices and by boiling. A small amount introduced into a wound or injected could be fatal; the contents of half a seed might be sufficient to kill a man.

The Blue Mahoe and Other Bush An Introduction to Plant Life in Jamaica (1971)

by C. Dennis Adams p.113

Weights:

Grain small single seed

Smallest unit of weight, originally the average weight of a grain of wheat.

1 grain = 1/7000 lb. avoirdupois, 0.0648 gram, 0.324 carats

Carat a unit of weight for precious stones = 200 milligrams

1 carat = 200 mg, 3.086 grains, 0.0071 oz

Carat a proportional measure of one twenty-fourth used in stating the purity of gold,
pure gold being 24 carats.

Proctor, p.476 Adenanthera pavonina – Curly Bean 'The seeds are often used to make necklaces; in India, they are also used as a standard measure of weight, 1 seed weighing about 4 grains.' (3 grains = 1carat)

2 seeds = 8 grains

4 seeds = 16 grains

2 seeds = 2.59 carats

4 seeds = 5.18 carats

Curly Bean 1 seed = 1.3 carats

Proctor, p 445 Abrus precatorius 2 seeds = 1 carat. 2 seeds = 3.0864 grains

4 seeds = 2 carats

Crab's Eye 1 seed = 0.5 carat

1 Curly Bean weighs 2.6 (2.592) Crab's Eyes Abrus