

FORESTRY DEPARTMENT

Plants of Note

Union Island

A practical guide to plants visitors should be aware of while exploring Chatham Bay Forest Reserve.

Stay on designated trails. Keep a safe distance, avoid handling plants without guidance, and respect the natural environment.

**LOOK • LEARN • LEAVE PLANTS
UNDISTURBED**

BRAZILIAN PEPPER



A shrub or small tree in the cashew family (Anacardiaceae), native to South America. Reddish stems carry pinnately compound leaves made up of small, glossy, finely toothed oval leaflets. Crushed leaves give off a peppery, turpentine-like smell. Small white flowers appear in clusters, followed by bright red berries that birds spread widely — one of the main reasons this species has become a serious problem throughout the Caribbean and Florida.

Brazilian Pepper — sap contact

Wash exposed skin with soap and cool water as soon as possible; avoid touching eyes or face beforehand. Remove and separately wash any contaminated clothing.

WHY IT MATTERS

Forms dense thickets that crowd out native vegetation, and its sap can cause a skin reaction similar to poison ivy in sensitive individuals (it is a close relative).

Never burn the plant — smoke from burning Brazilian pepper can cause severe respiratory and eye irritation. Apply a cold compress; hydrocortisone cream or calamine lotion can ease itching and redness.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF: blistering is severe, swelling spreads, or breathing is affected.

Plants to know

Look, keep your distance, and take care around these plants.

PRICKLY PEAR

Easily recognised by its flat, paddle-shaped stem segments (cladodes), each studded with clusters of long, sharp yellow spines. Common in dry coastal and scrubland areas across Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The pads and fruit of many *Opuntia* species are edible once the fine glochid spines are carefully removed — a food source used regionally, often called “nopal” or “tuna.”

HANDLING NOTE

Beyond the obvious large spines, the tiny hair-like glochids detach easily into skin and are difficult to see — handle with thick gloves.



Prickly Pear — spines and glochids
Remove large spines with tweezers, pulling out along the angle they entered. For fine glochid hairs, don't rub the area — this drives them in deeper. Press adhesive tape or household glue onto the skin, let it set, then peel it off to lift them out.

Wash the area with soap and water once spines are removed.

Watch the site over the following days for redness, warmth, or pus.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF: signs of infection develop, or spines can't be fully removed.

NETTLE

Also known as bull nettle, spurge nettle, or mala mujer (“evil woman”) in Spanish-speaking parts of the Caribbean. A member of the spurge family (Euphorbiaceae), identifiable by its broad, lobed, maple-like leaves and small white star-shaped flowers. Often found scrambling among other scrub and cactus, as pictured here.

Devil's Nettle — stinging hairs

Don't rub or scratch — this spreads the irritant and drives hairs in further.

Lift out visible hairs with adhesive tape, the same way as with glochids.

Rinse with cool (not hot) water; heat can worsen the reaction.

A cold compress and an antihistamine or hydrocortisone cream can reduce pain and itching. Most reactions settle within a few hours.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF: the rash spreads, swelling is significant, or there is any difficulty breathing.



WHY IT MATTERS

The entire plant — leaves and stems — is covered in stinging hairs that inject irritating chemicals on contact, producing a painful burning rash. Look, don't touch.

WAIT-A-MINUTE BUSH

A regional nickname applied across the Caribbean to various thorny, scrambling plants — usually in the pea/legume family — whose small hooked thorns snag skin and clothing, forcing you to stop and free yourself. On this site, the plant is an Albizia.

The fine, fern-like, twice-divided (bipinnate) leaflets shown here are typical of the genus. Several Albizia species occur regionally, so a clearer view of the stem, thorns, or flowers would help confirm the exact species.

Wait-a-while — thorn scratches and punctures

Clean the wound thoroughly with soap and water.

Remove any embedded thorn fragments with sterilised tweezers.

Apply an antiseptic and cover with a clean bandage.

Check that a tetanus booster is current, especially for deep or dirty punctures.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF: a fragment can't be removed, or the wound shows signs of infection.

