



GARDEN GUIDE

Dear guest,

The jungle of Petén has a variety of unique plants, some of which we have planted in our botanical garden. We have prepared this guide to share them with you. Note that many of the species you will find here are smaller or trimmed back, in order to keep the unobstructed lake view from the restaurant. Some images in this guide are just for reference and have not been taken at La Casa De Don David. At the end of the guide, we will also be adding photos of fruits and plants that we have not yet identified.

1. CAIMITO (*Chrysophyllum cainito*)



Native to Central America and found in many areas, this tree grows rapidly and can reach up to 20m in height. The leaves are golden on the underside. The fruit is round, with a purple skin. It is rich in latex and will stick to your fingers and mouth if you eat it before fully ripened. In season from early spring to early summer, and a favorite of many birds. The size of the fruit is ½ to 2" round or oval shaped, depending on the species.



2. GUAYA (*Melicoccus bijugatus*)



This tree can grow up to 30m in height. The fruit, a local favorite, grows in bunches and is the size of a grape, with a thin layer of skin that can be cracked by biting on the fruit and pushing the seed out. The seed is large, with a thin layer of creamy orange pulp with a sweet taste when fully ripe, sour when unripe. Fruit is harvested during the summer months.

3. ALLSPICE (*Pimenta dioica*)



This fruit is locally known as Pimienta Gorda, because of its resemblance to unground black pepper. Allspice is not a blend of spices as some people believe. The name was given by the English, who thought it combined the flavor of cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves. The fruit has white blooms in June and is normally harvested in August. It is exported and often used ground. Crush a leaf to reveal the sweet allspice scent. You can try this aromatic jungle tea in our restaurant, made from the antioxidant-rich leaves.



4. SAPODILLA (*Manilkara achras*)



An evergreen tree locally known as Chico Zapote, the sap from this tree's bark is extracted to make chicle, a natural chewing gum. Before the invention of synthetic gum, the jungle of Guatemala was exploited for chicle, and in the 1950's airstrips were built all over northern Guatemala for export. In some areas, chicle extraction is still practiced. The fruit is brown, 1 ½ to 2" in diameter. Edible when ripe, the fruit has a grainy texture and sweet caramel-like taste. It ripens after picked, harvested in mid to late summer. The hardwood from this tree was used by the Maya for construction and carving.



5. GOLDEN DWARF COCONUT (*Cocos nucifera*)



As the name suggests, this is a short variety of a coconut tree. We seldom get to use this yellow-orange fruit because it is a favorite of woodpeckers. They make small holes to drink the milk, causing the fruit to spoil before time of harvesting.

6. CEIBA (*Ceiba pentandra*)



The national tree of Guatemala and Sacred Tree of the Maya, this particular Ceiba was planted by Don David and helper Vitalino Payes on the 1st of January 2000, after Don David noticed that some locals were in doubt about what the millennium would bring. It seemed like a good idea to plant a Ceiba, also known as the “Tree of Life” in the Maya world. The Ceiba was considered by the ancient Maya to be the gateway to heaven for their souls, connecting the Underworld (Xibalbá) to the terrestrial realm and the sky. It is fast growing and can reach 70m in height, and 3m in diameter. The large tree seen along the main path into Tikal ruins is believed to be around 85-90

years old.

7. PITAYA (*Hylocereus undatus*)



Also known as dragon fruit, this particular variety grows on the *Hylocereus guatemalensis* cactus. In season June through September, the unique cactus flower is known as the Night-blooming Cereus, a striking white bloom that reaches up to 5” in diameter. It only blooms

at night, and only one night, fully opening between 9pm and midnight – if you are here during the season; don’t



miss photographing

this special occasion. By dawn the flower has wilted, and if pollinated will sprout a fruit approximately two weeks later. The Pitaya fruit has an exotic appearance when ripe, its skin bright pink with yellow-green blunt spikes. The flesh is white, with hundreds of tiny black seeds and texture similar to a kiwi. Other varieties of Pitaya have flesh just as pink as the skin.



8. CERICOTE (*Cordia dodecandra*)

The Cericote fruit, or Ziricote, is also called ‘higo maya’ or Maya fig, due to its similarity to a fig. It is used to make jams and preserves. The tree is a precious and beautiful hardwood, with black and white tones, often used by locals for woodcarving.



9. SANTA MARIA (*Tanacetum balsamita*)



Used for cooking and medicinal remedies, the Santa María plant makes very good tea when green. However, ingesting large quantities can be slightly toxic and is not recommended. Break off a leaf and crush it to reveal the strong aroma similar to licorice.

10. TROPICAL ALMOND (*Terminalia catappa*)



This tree can grow up to 35m in height and is found in many areas of Latin America. It has a very distinctive appearance, with large, glossy leaves that go from dark green to red. Both the fruit and the nut within the fruit are edible when ripe.

The fruit has a slightly acidic taste, turning from green to pink and yellow when ripe. A favorite with local kids, it is harvested in late summer and fall months.



11. GUAVA (*Psidium guajava*)



A tree that grows up to 10m high, with spreading branches, the guava ('guayaba' in Spanish) is easy to recognize because of its smooth, thin, beige colored bark that flakes off. The fruit is very rich in vitamins A and C, and is commonly used for making jams, marmalades, candy and juice. Unless insecticides are used, in many cases a small wasp-like fly lays eggs in the fruit just before ripening. The eggs hatch, revealing white larvae that make the fruit undesirable to eat. To avoid this, locally the fruit is picked and eaten before full ripening.



12. WATER APPLE (*Syzygium samarangense*)



This tree has pink and yellow-green bell shaped fruit, called ‘manzana de agua’ in Spanish. The texture is smooth and glossy on the outside, and similar to an apple on the inside, although it does not taste or smell like one. The flesh has a very mild flavor, and is as juicy as a watermelon. This fruit was introduced locally by the Taiwanese experimental farm in El Remate.

13. MANGO (*Mangifera indica*)



It is one of the most exploited tropical fruits for food, juice, flavor, fragrance and color. The fruit is pleasantly peach-like, juicy and with a somewhat stringy texture because of the fibers that come from the husk of the kidney-shaped seed. The mango tree is long lived and requires warm weather to grow fruit. Get especially colorful photographs when fruit ripens in May and June.



14. GUARUMO (*Cecropia peltrata*)



Also referred to as a trumpet tree, the guarumo has a symbiotic relationship with ants. It provides the ants with food and housing while they protect the tree. This tree grows rapidly but is short-lived, lasting around 30 years. Its fruit is a favorite among many species of birds and animals, especially parrots and toucans.



15. BULLHORN ACACIA (*Acacia cornigera*)



In Guatemala it is known as 'Ixcanal' and is a special tree for the Maya. This tree has large hollow thorns in which the species of ants *Pseudomyrmex ferruginea* make tiny holes for housing. Like the guarumo (see above), the tree and ants have a symbiotic relationship, one cannot live without the other. The ants feed on a secretion of sap on the leaf stalk, and small lipid-rich food bodies at the tips of the leaflets called Beltian bodies. In return, the ants provide protection for the plant against herbivores. Some species of ants will also fight off competing plants around the acacia, cutting off the offending plant's leaves with their jaws and ultimately killing it. At night, this acacia's leaves close and the tree 'sleeps'.



16. LEMONGRASS (*Cymbopogon sp.*)



Break off a leaf and crush it to reveal the strong, lemon-like aroma. One of the oldest herbs used for tea, lemongrass has many medicinal properties and uses, among them relief for digestion problems and depression, as well as antimicrobial, analgesic, antipyretic, antioxidant and anti-fungal properties. In aromatherapy, lemongrass is considered invigorating and energizing. The leaves grow up to 3ft tall. Ask for this tea in our restaurant.

17. DORMILONA (*Mimosa pudica*)



Called a 'sleepy' plant in Spanish because the leaves fold inward and droop when touched or shaken, re-opening minutes later. The species is native to South and Central America. There are similar plants in this garden that have yellow blooms but they do not 'sleep' when touched, only at night.

18. XATE



Native to the Petén jungle, several species of Xate palm are harvested throughout the area for export. This particular species (*Chamaedorea elegans*) is commonly called Xate Hembra, or ‘female xate’. The leaves are used in floral arrangements throughout the world, due to their long lasting qualities. Leaves are collected in season and refrigerated until shipped out locally by airplane each week from Flores airport.



19. GRANADILLA (*Passiflora ligularis*)



An orange, yellow and green colored passion fruit, this particular variety is oval shaped, with a hard outer shell and soft, padded interior lining to protect the seeds. The seeds are hard and black, surrounded by a tasty, gelatinous, transparent pulp. The pulp is the only edible part of the fruit and has a sweet and lightly acidic taste. It is very aromatic and contains vitamins A, C and K. Just break a thumb-sized hole in the shell and slurp out everything, eating the seed, juice and pulp.



20. ACHIOTE (*Bixa orellana*)



The fruit of the achiote tree is the source of Annatto, which is produced from the reddish pulp which surrounds the seed. It is used as a coloring and flavoring agent, sold in paste or powder form for culinary use. Central and South American native indians use the seeds to make body paint and lipstick. For this reason, the achiote is sometimes called the ‘lipstick’ tree. The fruit itself is inedible.



21. COFFEE



One of Guatemala's leading exports, coffee is commercially grown in many areas of southern Guatemala, but not profitable in this area. The warm climate of Petén is not suitable for production. The few plants we have here are just to show our visitors.

22. BANANA



Several species of bananas are grown throughout the garden. We leave most of the fruit on the trees to attract exotic birds. On the property we do not have the large plantain variety, which is widely consumed in Guatemala. Bananas, as coffee, are also one of Guatemala's major exports. Most of the large, commercial banana plantations are found south of the Río Dulce area.

23. GUMBO LIMBO (*Bursera simaruba*)



A small to medium sized tree that grows up to 30m in height, the gumbo limbo adapts to a variety of habitats, from dry to moist, and is very wind-tolerant. It is also known as the 'Tourist Tree' because of the appearance of the bark, which is red and peeling like the skin of a sun burnt tourist. In Spanish it is sometimes called Indio Desnudo (naked Indian) or Palo Jiote.

24. PAPAYA (*Carica papaya*)



A short lived but fast growing tropical plant, it must have warm weather to produce fruit. Both the fruit and leaves contain papain, an enzyme which is useful in tenderizing meat and helps with digestion. Papain is also known for its healing abilities, often used to treat cuts, rashes, stings and burns. The fruit varies in size, reaching up to 15" in length, with a round or oval shape.



25. SINCUYA (*Annona purpurea*)



A medicinal plant with edible fruit, the sincuya is native to Mexico, Central and South America. The tree can reach up to 10m in height. The fruit is 6 to 8" in diameter, green with blunt spikes. The pulp is similar to mango in scent, appearance and texture. The tart fruit ripens in late summer to fall.

26. GUANABANA (*Annona muricata*)



Also known as soursop, this fruit grows on a small evergreen tree reaching up to 4m in height. The fruit is green, prickly and egg-shaped, up to 12" long and 6" wide. The soft, fibrous pulp is cream-colored, with large black seeds and a musky, slightly acidic flavor. It makes for a refreshing drink and good homemade ice cream.

27. NONI (*Morinda citrifolia*)



Found in a variety of habitats, the Noni can grow up to 9m tall. A pale yellow-green color when ripe, the fruit is 1 ½ to 4" long, with bumpy, knotted skin. The fruit has a pungent and unpleasant odor, which is why we do not leave it on the tree. It is used for juice due to its powerful anti-aging, anti-inflammatory properties and antioxidants. Harvested year round.

28. TRAVELER'S PALM (*Ravenala madagascariensis*)



This plant, native to Madagascar, is not actually a palm, rather from the bird of paradise family. Easily recognized because of its fan-like shape, it is called a traveler's palm because of the leaf stems ability to hold rainwater that can be used for an emergency supply. The spiked flower carries electric blue seeds inside.

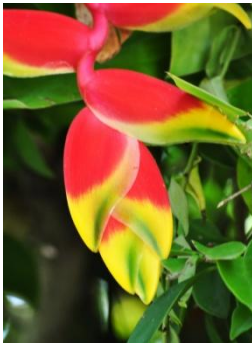


29. ACEITUNO (*Simarouba glauca*)



Also known as a paradise tree, it grows rapidly and reaches an average height of 12m. The seeds produce an edible oil. Very effective against global warming, this tree converts solar energy to biochemical energy year round, and checks erosion and overheating of the soil. Tea made from the bark is used to treat dysentery, malaria, intestinal parasites, and hemorrhaging. It is also used as a powerful astringent to clean wounds and sores.

30. HELICONIA



Several varieties of heliconias can be found throughout the garden. The most recognized is the *Heliconia rostrata*, called lobster claw or papagayo in Guatemala. The most prevalent in our garden, this plant grows mainly around the gazebo. Unlike other heliconias which grow upright, these pendulous flowers hang up to 3' in length. Often used in gardens because of their striking red color with yellow-green tips, they bloom year round.

The *Heliconia wagneriana*, widely cultivated throughout Central America, can also be found in small quantities in our garden.



31. JOCOTE MARANON (*Anacardium occidentale*)



Most people are familiar with the cashew nut, but do not know about its origins. The jocote marañon is a bell shaped, yellow and red colored cashew apple with a small pod attached to the end, which is considered the true fruit. Inside this pod you will find the cashew nut. The pod must be properly roasted before extracting the nut for consumption, as the toxins of the shell can cause severe allergic reactions.

The fruit is used in Guatemala for making an iced drink, containing citrus and mango undertones, but the tongue-cracking tartness can put off some people.

32. RED GINGER (*Alpinia purpurata*)



Grown in tropical climates and present throughout our garden, the red ginger is an ornamental plant also attractive to bees, butterflies and birds. It can reach 3m in height, while flowers reach up to 12". Like the *Heliconia rostrata*, it blooms year round and the flower is long lasting after cut. This is not the same type of ginger used

for spice, although they are of the same Zingiberaceae family.

