

CHAPTER IX.

SOME COMMON FLORIDA PLANTS.



HAVE often been asked to recommend plants which will make good hedges for South Florida. For this purpose I know nothing better than Carissa or Natal Plum. There are supposed to be two species of Carissa in Florida—*grandiflora* and *arduina*, but I can see no difference. This bush is always a rich dark green. It has vicious thorns; it bears a sweet scented white flower and red plum-like fruit. It is easily reproduced by layering and may be grown from seed. It is best always to propagate from a heavy bearing plant, since it seems that all strains are not the same in this respect. When cooked the fruit makes a sauce hardly distinguishable from cranberry. The sauce is improved by the addition of a few chopped raisins. This plant bears throughout the year, and the sauce is welcome at almost every meal. I believe this fruit can be successfully dried or evaporated, as are dates, figs, raisins, prunes, etc. The home of this bush is South Africa, where it is effectively used for hedges. It seems to be perfectly adapted to Florida conditions.

Another good hedge plant is the lime. This yields the well-known "sour" of commerce which will in time no doubt replace the lemon. For good limes there is a growing demand and after one has become accustomed to using them he ever after spurns the lemon. No home in the tropics is complete without a few lime trees.

The same may be said of the guava, sometimes referred to as the "apple of Florida." The guava grows with little care,

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fruits heavily and is perhaps the greatest of all jelly fruits. The ripe fruit has a smell which is at first detested by the newcomer, quite in contrast to the aromatic lime, but one usually learns to relish it, after a time, out of hand. Guava jelly brings many dollars to Florida and I know several small jelly factory owners who ship their products to every State in the Union and to England as well.

The Surinam cherry is a handsome bush. It yields an abundance of rich red cherries which are relished on a par with northern cherries by many people. It is of course in no way related to the true cherry of the North, and it has a slight resinous flavor, but it is a good substitute.

Around every home there should be many pigeon pea bushes. This is the cajan bush of India and Africa, now common throughout the tropics of the world. The peas are worth fifteen cents a quart. They make the famous pigeon pea or Congo pea soup. The negroes cook them green. They shade the ground, improve the soil, keep down weeds and deposit a rich leaf-mold over the surface of the ground. I plant them in my grove. Chickens, quail and doves are fond of the peas and they flourish in the shade, scratching for bugs and the peas which fall.

The Castor bean grows well in Florida and ought to be an extensive industry. There is good demand for the oil, and the pumice from the seeds is a fine fertilizer.

All of the above have been introduced into this State but are now perfectly at home here. Among our native plants we have many yet to try and to improve under careful cultivation.

Some time ago my attention was attracted to a little pea-like plant growing by the roadside. It reminded me of the white clover of the North and like the famous camomile grows the faster the more it is trod upon. I am testing it and think it will make a fine lawn plant. In looking up its name I find it belongs to the Indigo genus, *Indigofera mineata*, and this reminds me of the fact that indigo was once extensively grown in Florida before the days of aniline dyes and synthetic chemists.

In patches out in the Everglades there are many pond-ap-

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ples. The pond-apple is the Florida representative of the great Anona family which includes many delicious fruits. Some people eat the pond-apple and I think I have seen it on sale in Mexican markets. The wood of the pond-apple is almost as light as cork, and may be used in place of cork for net floats, etc.

The pond-apple may prove a good stock on which to bud the famous Cherimolia, Rollinia, Uvaria and other choice, but little known, fruits of this order.

Nothing is commoner on islands in the Everglades than the Coco-plum. This is a beautiful small tree yielding a fruit which makes a fine preserve. There is great variation in the quality of the fruit. In many cases it is mostly one big seed but I have seen some that were large and meaty and well worthy of cultivation and improvement. It is not very distantly related to the peach, apricot, etc., being of the same family, and might be useful as a hardy stock for budding something of greater merit.

We have a wild West Indian cherry fruiting in our hammocks which might be useful also as a stock for budding purposes.

I have used above the word "hammock," the term applied in South Florida to a dense hardwood jungle. This is not the same word as "hummock," or the same as "hammock," a swinging bed, but is probably a word of local Indian origin, spelled in early times "hamak."

I will conclude this chapter with a few words in reference to the humble coontie or comptie, a little plant which grows wild everywhere in the pine woods, avoiding the wet places. The root of this plant kept the early settlers supplied with starch for bread, as well as the Indians before them. It was the main industry of this country in the early days. The starch from the root is still in demand. It is a sago. From it easily digested and nutritious biscuits can be made. In the wild state the plant contains prussic acid and is poisonous and for that reason is never molested except by man and the comptie fly, a beautiful insect which is immune to its deadly juice. Fire does not injure it, in fact helps to scatter the seeds, since the heat opens the cone-like head which holds them.

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Cassava also grows like a weed in Florida. From its root a starch is made. If further treated this starch becomes the tapioca of commerce.

With its sunshine and its moisture, with its host of useful native and introduced plants, with its black mucky soils and light sandy soils, with its vast beds of phosphate holding great stores of the most precious of all plant foods, phosphorus, with its long coast line and canals and harbors to come, it seems to me that all this great State lacks is people with capital and energy to furnish fun and feed for millions.