



# Plants and Heritage

*Caribbean Chapter of the Society for Economic Botany*

## Caribbean Chapter Launched

The Caribbean Chapter of the Society for Economic Botany was launched at the 51st Annual Meeting of the Society in Xalapa, Mexico. The desire to form the Caribbean chapter of the SEB was fueled by the 50th Annual Meeting in 2009 which was hosted by the College of Charleston, South Carolina, and focused on African Ethnobotany in the Americas.

The objective of the chapter is the function as a base for ethnobotany in the Caribbean through which knowledge sharing and exchange can take place and collaborations established. The chapter will encourage collaborative research projects to document, protect and explore the heritage of plant use in the region, a recognized biodiversity hot-spot.

The current President of the chapter is Dr. Sonia Peter, Barbados Community College.



**National Botanical Garden, Xalapa**

Response to the formation of the chapter has been significant and other members of the executive are being installed. The executive will be working towards generating a list of ethnobotanical researchers in the Caribbean and establishing a digital library of publications.

A highlight will be the first

meeting of the chapter which will take place at a venue to be voted on by members. Focus will also be given to participation at upcoming meetings of the society in St. Louis, USA in 2011 and Vienna, Austria in 2012. Long term plans for hosting the Annual Meeting of the SEB will also be discussed.

## Plants Used in the Treatment of Diabetes and Hypertension in Rural Barbados

A paper on the use of plants in the treatment of diabetes and hypertension was presented at the 50th Annual Meeting of the SEB, 2009. The theme of the meeting was 'Ethnobotany in the Americas and the African Diaspora'.

This presentation demonstrated how the tradition passed down from enslaved Africans to their descendants in the island has been preserved in rural areas and still practiced by about 50 % of the rural population.

Plants found to be efficacious in these therapies include breadfruit and trumpet tree (pop-a-gun) of the Moraceae family, cerasee bush, bayleaf, pear (avocado) and parsley. Formulations are made using mainly the leaves of the plant.

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### *Special points of interest:*

- Caribbean Chapter of the Society for Economic Botany launched.
- Mango Festival
- 'Mood Indigo Caribbean'
- New members of the Caribbean Chapter
- Medicinal Plants and the Legacy of Richard E Schultes

### *Inside this issue:*

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Natural Dyes Revisited                     | 2 |
| Mango Festival in Trinidad and Tobago 2010 | 3 |
| New members of the Caribbean Chapter       | 3 |
| 52nd Annual Meeting of the SEB             | 3 |
| Baobab Trees of Barbados                   | 4 |

## Natural Dyes Revisited

‘Mood Indigo Caribbean - Dyeing for the Blues’ is the name of the project being conducted by the Barbados Fashion Alliance to explore natural sources of dyes and hence contribute to the ‘greening’ of the image of the fashion Industry in Barbados. The project is being funded by the United Nations Development Fund and is being conducted in collaboration with the Barbados Community College and the Ministry of Agriculture.

A number of locally grown plant species are being selected for the research project. The plants have been selected to cover a spectrum of colours which will be tested for properties such as fastness and photo-degradation. The indigo plant will be given focus as indicated by the name. The growing of indigo is of historical significance to Barbados and *Indigo tinctoria* can still be found growing naturally.

Project Manager, Lucille Junkere, brings years of project management expertise to the project and is also a milliner. She expressed her commitment to the project. “Mood Indigo Caribbean is one of the most innovative and rewarding projects I have been involved with. The project, funded through the united nations development Project Small Grants programme brings together an unusual collaboration of disciplines: history, botany, culture, chemistry, economic agronomy, fashion, art and organic farming to explore the potential of a selection of Caribbean plants as sources of natural colourants. There is growing disquiet about the environmental impact of synthetic dyes and we are happy to be part of this movement, making our small but valuable contribution to raising awareness about environmental sustainability issues and the need to protect and preserve our Caribbean botanical and cultural heritage”



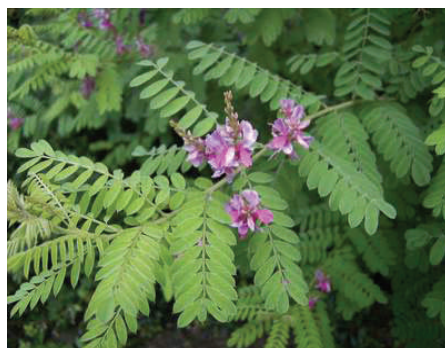
**Lipstick Tree — *Bixa orellana***  
Seeds produce an orange dye

### *Mood Indigo Caribbean \_ Dyeing for the Blues’*



**Lucille Junkere**  
Project Manager  
Mood Indigo Caribbean

## Natural Dye Sources



**Annatto seeds and indigo plant, respectively (l-r).**

## Mango Festival— Trinidad and Tobago 2010

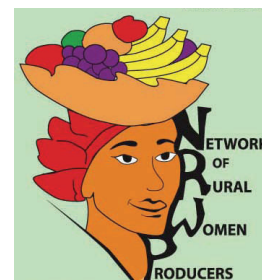
The Network of Rural Women Producers, Trinidad and Tobago, organized the second annual mango festival in Trinidad and Tobago, July 25th, 2010. The event was conceptualized with the assistance of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the Interamerican Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture and the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine services. Support was also received from the Division of Gender Affairs.

The day was full of activities meant to promote mango as a business enterprise, to teach people about the various features

of the mango and to offer some tempting mango delicacies. The day opened with a mango market, and a presentations on how mangoes are used around the world in various ceremonies. There was also a Tea Center and a Mango Folklore Centre and a forum on the importance of mango in Caribbean Literature, Naturally, the day's activities ended with a chow-down of sorts and competition to see who could prepare the most exciting and innovative mango dish.

The members of the NRWPTT is looking forward to the 2011 festival and are working to have the Mango Festival listed as

one of the main festivals on the island which will add to the T&T tourism product.



### Mango Festival—Trinidad and Tobago

## New members of the Caribbean Chapter SEB

The Caribbean Chapter of the SEB is gradually capturing the attention of those in the Caribbean interested in the research and preservation of the heritage knowledge associated with the use of plants in the region. Research activity, however, is not being exposed thereby allowing the benefits of knowledge sharing and collaborations.

One of the key roles of the Caribbean

chapter is to offer a forum for exchange. Here are some new members of the chapter:

Mike Wallace—Grand Bahama, Bahamas

Dr. Laura Nkrumah— UWI, Trinidad and Tobago

Rhoda Bharath— UWI, Trinidad and Tobago

Sharon Jones—Dominica Herbal Business

Association

Dr. Anthony Richards—Antigua

Network of Rural Women Producers—Trinidad and Tobago

David Bynoe — Min. of Agriculture, Barbados

Zonia Phillips— Barbados

Lucille Junkere—Barbados

## 52nd Annual Meeting of the Society for Economic Botany

The 52nd Annual meeting of the society will take place in St. Louis, Missouri, USA. The meeting is scheduled for July 09—13, 2011 with the venue being the William Brown Centre at the Missouri Botanical Garden. The main symposium is 'Healing the Planet' which will focus on Medicinal Plants and the Legacy of Richard E. Schultes'.

Dr. Schultes was often considered to be the father of ethnobotany for his extensive

study of indigenous cultures and their use of plants for medicine and rituals. Decades of research in Colombia's Amazon region saw him documenting the use of over 2000 plants used for medicine by Indians of over a dozen tribes.

His philosophical perspective guided his research and activism in the protection of rain forests and the embodied native culture associated with the use of plants.

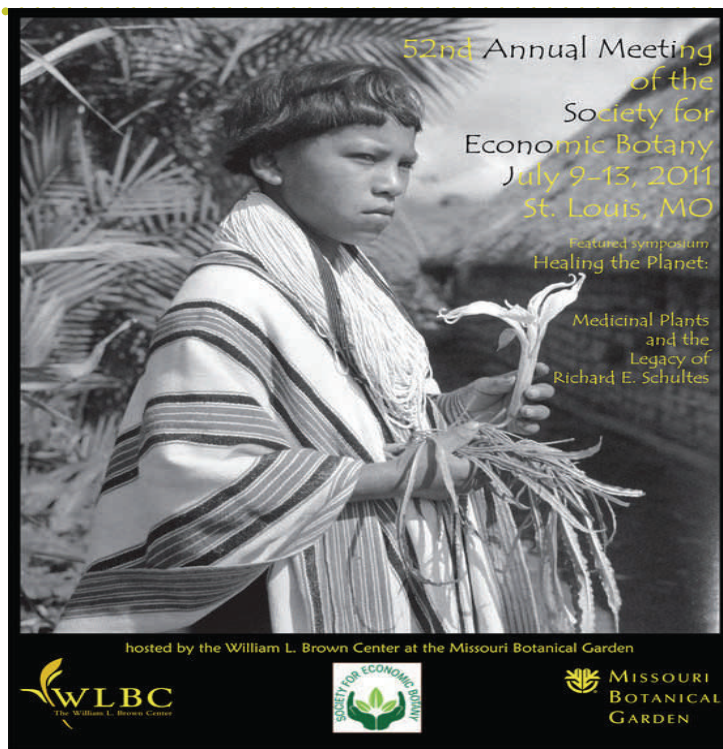
*Dr. Richard E. Schultes  
1915-2001*



## Caribbean Chapter of the Society for Economic Botany

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## The Baobab Trees of Barbados

Barbados is home to two mature Baobab, *Adansonia digitata*, trees which have been included in the Barbados Tourism Encyclopedia as one of the seven wonders of the island.

One specimen of girth, approximately 45 ft is located in Warrens, St. Michael, which is rapidly becoming a busy commercial area and likely to become the second city on the island. The other larger tree is located in Queen's Park, in one of the oldest cities in the Caribbean, Bridgetown, and is said to require 15 adults joined at arms length to surround the tree at its circumference.

A plaque erected at the Warren's site, by the Barbados National Trust, has an inscription which proposes that the tree was brought to Barbados around 1738 from Guinea, Africa. This makes the tree over

270 years old. The tree in Queen's Park is claimed to be close to 1000 years old.

Recent generations have lost touch with the heritage value of the Baobab tree as African heritage has suffered from post emancipation shackles. It is claimed, however, that anyone who cuts down a Baobab tree will be haunted by the spirits that live in the branches of the tree. These spirits are felt to be souls of ancestors that are protective of modern generations.

The trees appear to be thriving well although the erection of nearby buildings at the Warrens site may place that specimen under some stress. However, a conscious effort has been made by engineers and planners to minimize impact on the Baobab and surrounding trees in the area, and this is to be commended.



Baobab tree in Queen's Park, Bridgetown, Barbados.