

The Historical Walking Tour of Taipei Botanical Garden

Plant Collections

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When you enter Taipei Botanical Garden (TPBG), the first impression is from those large trees that were planted since Japanese colonization. Taipei Botanical Garden was formerly built as a nursery in 1895 by Colonial Assets Bureau of Taiwan Governor-General's Office. In the beginning, the nursery mainly cultivated camphor trees with high economic values. Latterly, it started introducing exotic palms as well as ornamental aquatic plants. The plant collections were enlarged as agriculture requirement, bringing more seedlings from tropical Asia through overseas commerce. The collected areas included Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Java, India, and Sri Lanka, even as far as Australia and Hawaii. Besides species from above mentioned areas, the nursery also collected plants from tropical Africa and America that were cultivated in visited areas or mainland Japan. In 1911, the nursery was relocated to Forestry Experimental Station, and renamed as Taipei Botanical Garden in 1921. Nowadays, those immigrants settle down well as a "green lung" in the capital city Taipei. We are going to present some most significant plant collections in this brochure.



Royal Palm

Roystonea regia

The giant *Roystonea regia* (Royal palm) that creates a tropical scene for TPBG was first introduced in 1898, and those seedlings were lost during a flooding event. The palms grown in TPBG were reintroduced by the botanist Kenji Imai in 1903, and are the oldest batch of Royal palms existing in Taiwan. Some of them even had bullet scars on trunks during WWII. Most old Royal palms that are grown in schools and parks all over Taiwan probably originate from TPBG.



Sugar Palm

Borassus flabellifer

Being native to South and Southeast Asia, rarely plants are as multi-functional as *Borassus flabellifer* (Sugar palm). For example, the old Tamil wrote literature in preserved Palm leaves (Palm-leaf manuscript), and had developed 801 functions to use the palm for daily lives! The name sugar palm, derived from the sugary sap that can be obtained from the young inflorescence, either male or female ones, is concentrated to a crude sugar, and is widely used in Javanese cuisine. The seed of *Borassus flabellifer* was first sent to TPBG by Hayato Fukuba from Shinjuku Cyoen National Garden, but was lost during a flooding event. The two palms planted in TPBG were brought by Yoshiharu Fujine in 1909 from India. Young sugar palms grow slowly in the beginning, but then grow faster with age. Hence the historic photograph shows that the palms were quite short in 1929 in comparison with impressively tall trees nowadays.



Chinese Fan Palm

Livistona chinensis

Although *Livistona chinensis* (Chinese fan palm) is considered as native plant in Taiwan, it only distributes in Guishan Island, a small island located in the north-eastern Taiwan. During Japanese rule, the palm seeds were introduced from islands Ogasawara and Okinawa and cultivated in TPBG. Today, most Chinese fan palms that are grown in Taiwan originated from mother trees in TPBG.



Princess Alexandra Palm

Archontophoenix alexandrae

The *Archontophoenix alexandrae* (Princess Alexandra palm) planted in front of the historic building, the Guest House of Imperial Envoys is native in Australia, and introduced from mainland Japan. Despite with thin trunks, those palms are grown for more than 100 years. The plant was named after princess Alexandra of Denmark for its elegant posture.



Canary Island Date Palm

Phoenix canariensis

Phoenix canariensis is a member of the palm family, native to the Canary Islands. The tree is world-widely cultivated as an ornamental plant. The fruit "date" is edible, and the sap of this date palm is used to make palm syrup. The two individuals in TPBG were brought from India by Yokohama Nursery Company in 1909. However, they are both male and fail to reproduce.



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Blue Trumpet Vine

Thunbergia grandiflora

Thunbergia grandiflora is a woody vine, native to India. The plant was first brought to TPBG by agriculturist Yoshiharu Fujine from Singapore, and was planted on the frame of an arch bridge. Today, the bridge frame and the very first vine have been removed; however, its descendants are widely planted in Taiwan nowadays.

Bread Fruit Tree

Artocarpus incisus

The nursery used to vigorously collect economic plant species, including *Artocarpus incisus* (Bread fruit tree) that grows throughout Southeast Asia and most Pacific Ocean islands. The name is derived from the taste of the cooked fruit which is a staple food in many tropical regions. Joseph Banks, a botanist accompanying Captain James Cook, noted that to feed a generation and the next, all a man had to do was plant 10 bread fruit trees, and that it would take only half an hour. Bread fruit tree was intensively used among Pacific Islanders. Except edible fruits, its lightweight wood is used as timber for outrigger canoes, and the tree latex is useful for boat caulking. However, only few aborigines in eastern Taiwan occasionally cook breadfruits; the tree is grown mostly for ornamental plants. There exists one bread fruit tree planted around the former herbarium in TPBG since Japanese rule.



Madras Thorn

Pithecellobium dulce

Pithecellobium dulce (Madras thorn) is native in tropical America, and was first introduced and planted in Tainan by Dutch in 17's. Between 1904 to 1905, a large number of its seeds was introduced from Thailand by Tatsuji Nakamura, and the tree was widely planted in Taiwan. The seedlings of *Pithecellobium dulce* in TPBG had been planted as road trees in Aiguo West Road. However they were removed and today only two trees remain in TPBG near the central greenhouse and the gate of National Museum of History.



Paper Flower

Bougainvillea spectabilis

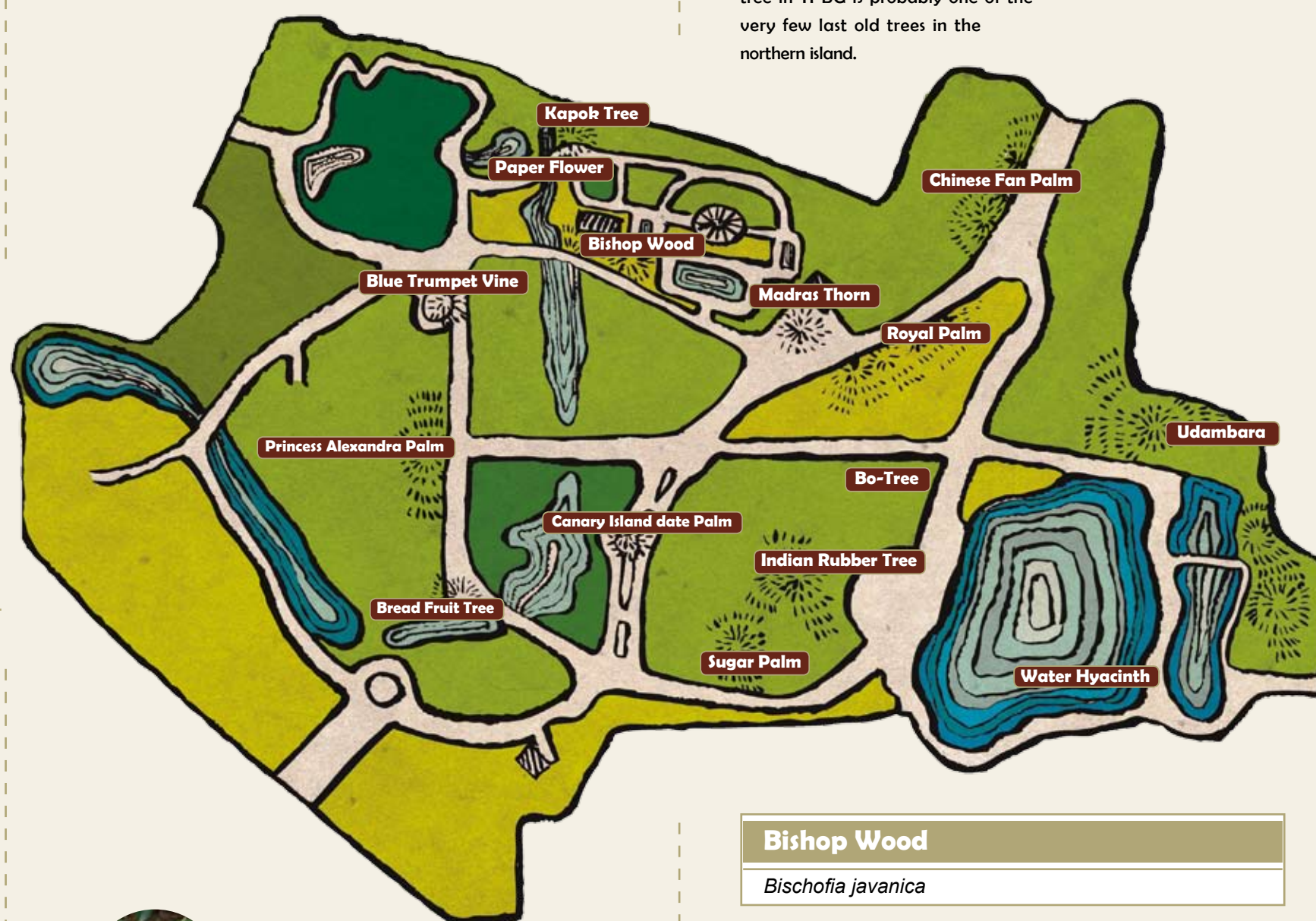
Bougainvillea is a woody vine native to South America from Brazil west to Peru and south to southern Argentina. This common garden plant was cultivated since British inhabited Tamsui, and was officially introduced by botanist Yasusada Tashiro from Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden in 1901. The bright colours of the plant are actually derived from the bracts surrounding tiny white flowers. The old *Bougainvillea* with thick, strangling vines is a must-see in TPBG.



Kapok Tree

Ceiba pentandra

Ceiba pentandra is native to tropical America, and a variety *C. pentandra* var. *guineensis* to tropical west Africa. The common name Kapok may refer to the cotton (i.e. seeds surrounded fluffy fibre) obtained from its pods. The tree grows to 60 - 70 metres, having a substantial trunk with buttresses. Before synthetic fibres were developed, the kapok fibre was previously much used in life jackets and as filling in mattresses and pillows. Therefore the government encouraged cultivation of the Kapok and introduced seedlings dozens of times between 1903 and 1937. However, the tall trunk is often damaged by typhoons in Taiwan. Despite there are still some old trees existing in southern Taiwan, the Kapok tree in TPBG is probably one of the very few last old trees in the northern island.



Bishop Wood

Bischofia javanica

In Taiwan, *Bischofia javanica* commonly grow in the lowlands, and are widely planted as road trees and shady trees. Some monumental trees are even paid obeisance in the rural area. Although *Bischofia javanica* is native to Taiwan, a large number of seedlings was introduced from abroad to meet a vast demand for cultivation during Japanese rule. A historic photograph of the *Bischofia javanica* planted by central green house in 1920 has turned into a giant tree today. Do not miss the epiphytic *Hoya carnososa*, and its firework-like flowers hanging on the tree.



Udambara

Ficus racemosa

In Buddhist literature, Udumbara (Sanskrit) refer to the tree, *Ficus racemosa*, under which the past Buddha attained enlightenment. As in all figs, the flowers of the Udumbara are enclosed within its fruit. Therefore, the flower was said to bloom visually only once every 3,000 years to symbolize rarity in Buddhist legend. The Japanese word Udonge was used to refer to the Udumbara flowers, and also to the lacewing eggs. The insect lay eggs in a pattern similar to a flower, hence the eggs are sometime misinterpreted as rare Udumbara flowers! The Udumbara planted in TPBG was brought from Singapore by Ryoso Kanehira in 1922.



Bo-Tree

Ficus religiosa

Ficus religiosa is a fig tree native to India, south-west China and Indochina, and is described in Buddhist legend that Buddha attained enlightenment while meditating underneath the tree. *Ficus religiosa* is a large dry season-deciduous tree with a spreading canopy, and is widely planted as ornamental purpose. A pot plant of the tree was brought from Koishikawa Botanical Garden by Yasusada Tashiro in 1901, but died soon after. In 1911, a batch of seedlings was reintroduced to TPBG by Yoshiharu Fujine from Singapore and became mother trees for descendants in Taiwan.



Water Hyacinth

Eichhornia crassipes

Lotus pond is one of the attractions in TPBG. However, the pond used to grow the rare exotic plant, *Eichhornia crassipes* (water hyacinth) that were introduced from Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden in Tokyo. Despite its notoriety as a worldwide invasive species, water hyacinths can purify water by absorbing pollutants including harmful heavy metals.



Indian Rubber Tree

Ficus elastica

In 1901, *Ficus elastica* (Indian rubber tree) was introduced from Japan by Yasusada Tashiro and cultivated heavily in TPBG and southern Taiwan (Hengchun) for an economic purpose of rubber collection. Yet the rubber production of Indian rubber tree is far less than the rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*) native to Amazon rainforests, the India rubber tree are grown as ornamental plants. According to the price list in 1906, the most expensive seedling sold by TPBG is India rubber tree.

