

TITLE: Medicinal Plants: The Blueprints of a New Urban Legacy

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ABSTRACT

Medicinal plant data in the Caribbean is disparately stored, often found in the form of printed material, with the rich heritage of indigenous knowledge held by a few and no known active educational dissemination drives taking place. The management of medicinal plant resources is left for the few herbal and horticultural enthusiasts, the botanist and related academicians. In short, the vision, policies and approach to managing a resource with a massive wealth of potential economic return, in the form of pharmaceuticals and herbal products, is almost non-existent.

The Caribbean is a geographical region known for its botanical diversity and endemism. TRAMIL (Scientific Research on Medicinal Plants in the Caribbean) is one of the initiatives existing in the region for the protection of medicinal plant diversity. It is widely accepted that traditional medicine indicate the presence of a biologically active constituent(s) in a plant that could lead to the discovery of medicine.

The value of medicinal plants to the progress of the region is locked in a tangled web of mismanagement, an apathetic approach to education and research and lack of regulatory policies. A powerful solution begins in massive public awareness and education. The aesthetic value of plants to our urban areas cannot be overshadowed by its vital role in a greener and more sustainable environment. Medicinal plants can serve this dual role and act as a central point for the public to develop working awareness of their value and of our ecological heritage.

It is proposed that integration of small medicinal plant microcosms in urban landscapes can be created for educational purposes similar to The Botanical Garden of Padua in Italy, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The benefits would far outstrip the immediate intent and overlap positively with ecotourism and develop a new regional identity for conservation and awareness.