

NYBG

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NYBG's *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience* Highlights the Plants and Gardening Histories That Are Essential to Afro-Caribbean Foodways, Including Those Brought to the United States by Caribbean Immigrants

Curated by Dr. Jessica B. Harris, America's Leading Scholar of the Foodways of the African Diaspora, the Newly Reimagined Garden Opens Saturday, June 17, 2023, with a Symposium and Juneteenth Weekend Celebration at the Edible Academy



African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience is the second year of a three-year collaboration at NYBG's Edible Academy. (Photo by Ben Hider/The New York Botanical Garden)



Jessica B. Harris, Ph.D., America's leading scholar of the foods of the African Diaspora

Bronx, NY—Curated by Jessica B. Harris, Ph.D., America's leading scholar of the foods of the African Diaspora, the newly reimagined *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience* at The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) highlights the plants and gardening histories that are essential contributions to Afro-Caribbean foodways, including those that have been brought to the United States by Caribbean immigrants. *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience* opens to the public on Saturday, June 17, 2023, in conjunction with the Botanical Garden's Juneteenth observance this year and will be celebrated with a symposium, Afro-Caribbean culinary demonstrations, gardening activities, a maker station, and other family activities. It will be on view through Wednesday, November 1, 2023.

Now in its second year, the African American Garden at NYBG's Edible Academy is a three-year collaboration between scholars and local artists to celebrate the history of the African Diaspora in the Americas through the lens of plants and food, presented in the Barnsley Beds, a sequence of eight vegetable garden beds arranged in a semi-circle. In 2022, *African American Garden: Remembrance & Resilience* gave a curated view of the diverse world of African Americans and their foodways in the context of the United States from rice, okra, and other grains and greens to cotton, tobacco, indigo, watercress, and licorice root.

For 2023, *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience* features more than 140 plant varieties to reflect the biodiversity of the region. The garden begins with a bed designed to mimic a sugarcane field, highlighting the centrality of sugar to the Afro-Caribbean experience, as sugarcane was initially cultivated by the forced labor of enslaved Africans. This year's garden will include the tropical bounty of fruit trees such as mango and coconut and the plants grown in lush kitchen gardens known as *canucos* in the Caribbean, including cassava and pineapple. The garden will feature plants used for medicine, ceremonies, and creativity such as for weaving baskets, dyeing fabrics, and making musical instruments.

"The Caribbean region is one of vast cultural diversity," said Dr. Harris, an NYBG Trustee who has written 12 books on the foods and foodways of the African Diaspora, including *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America*. "As people stroll through the garden, they will enter the Caribbean plant world past and present and learn its history and a bit about the wondrous region. I hope that visitors will leave informed and delighted, amused and amazed."

As in 2022, the final bed of the garden focuses on continuity—both with African traditions brought to the Caribbean and with Afro-Caribbean traditions brought to the United States, and specifically to the Bronx. Interpretive signage provides historical context, and to reflect the geographic, cultural, and linguistic complexity of the region, the signage will be presented in three languages: English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole.

Cave Canem Foundation—the premier home for Black poetry, committed to cultivating the artistic and professional growth of African American poets—has once again curated a Poetry Walk for *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience*, featuring six poems by Afro-Caribbean poets. The poets are Desiree C. Bailey, who is from Trinidad and Tobago and Queens and is the author of *What Noise Against the Cane*; Louise Bennett, who was born in Kingston, Jamaica, and whose many works include *Anancy Stories And Poems In Dialect*; Jane Alberdeston Coralin, who was born in Puerto Rico and whose work has been published in various anthologies and journals, including *Sargasso: A Journal of Caribbean Literature*; Marie-Ovide Dorcelly, who was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and whose poems, essays, and translations have appeared in many publications, including *Callaloo* and *Ploughshares*; Gustavo Pérez Firmat, originally from Cuba, who is the author of several books of poetry in Spanish and English, including *Bilingual Blues*; and Rico Frederick, who was born in Trinidad and is the author of *Broken Calypsonian*. As with the interpretive signage, the poems will be presented in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole.

"The contribution of Caribbean peoples to the survival of the African Diaspora cannot be overstated and is *the* example of liberty and self-determination—the demonstration that Black people could dismantle the global power of morally bankrupt enslavers and build a nation in the colonized world. So too, its contributions to our poetry!" said Dante Micheaux, Cave Canem's Director of Programs. "Cave Canem is excited to return as curator for the second iteration of the African American Garden Poetry Walk. The selection of poems in *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience* captures the Caribbean's cosmopolitanism."

The African American Garden also includes an orientation center and the work of two Bronx-based artists: a Caribbean audio track curated by Justin Goodman of Red Gate Sound and a drink stand

painted by Bronx artist Noble Dre*Ali. A traditional red Juneteenth beverage will be available at the stand 1–3:30 p.m. on weekends.

More information about NYBG's *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience* is available at:

<https://www.nybg.org/event/african-american-garden-the-caribbean-experience/>

Juneteenth Weekend Programming for All Ages

To mark the opening of *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience* and to celebrate Juneteenth, NYBG will present a symposium about Caribbean foodways, and the Edible Academy campus will host a variety of hands-on activities and cooking demonstrations.

- ***African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience Symposium***

Saturday, June 17, 2023; 10 a.m.–12 p.m.; Arthur and Janet Ross Lecture Hall
Free Event; Advance Registration Required

This symposium, presented by NYBG's Humanities Institute with support from the Mellon Foundation, will explore food stories of the Caribbean in two compelling sessions that consider history and memory, as well as the culinary journeys of both people and plants.

- ***Mangoes, Breadfruit, Callaloo, And Bottle Gourds: Stories Told by Plants of the Caribbean***

Jamaica Kincaid in Conversation with Dr. Jessica B. Harris

Award-winning author **Jamaica Kincaid** will sit down with **Dr. Jessica B. Harris** to talk about Caribbean plants and their associated narratives. This wide-ranging dialogue will cover topics such as Kincaid's writings on Caribbean gardens and gardening and the associations certain plants have to culinary traditions first brought to the Caribbean by Africans and Europeans and then carried by immigrants to the United States. The conversation will touch on migration, adaptation, perseverance, and power, as manifested through plants.

- Born in Antigua, **Jamaica Kincaid** is an award-winning Caribbean African American author best known for her evocative portrayals of family relationships, interwoven with themes of colonialism, gender, race, and class. She is also an accomplished gardener who has expanded the scope of garden writing in essays and memoirs, including her 2020 *New Yorker* essay "Disturbances of the Garden" and *My Garden (Book)*. She is a Professor of African American Studies at Harvard.
- **Dr. Jessica B. Harris** is America's leading scholar of the food and foodways of the African Diaspora. Dr. Harris received the James Beard Lifetime Achievement Award in 2020, and she was named one of *Time* magazine's *100 Most Influential People of 2021*. In the same year, her book *High on the Hog* was adapted into a Netflix series; in 2022, the series won a Peabody and an NAACP Image Award, and it was renewed for a second season. She serves on NYBG's Board of Trustees.

- ***Preserving History: The Power of Sugar in the Caribbean and Beyond***

- *Panel Discussion*

- Food historian **Scott Alves Barton**, Ph.D., will moderate a discussion about the history and culture of the Caribbean and the central role played by sugar in the region—and beyond.

- Panelists include **Pierre Serrao**, co-founder of the popular Bronx-based culinary collective Ghetto Gastro; **Shannon Mustipher**, cocktail consultant, spirits educator, and author of the award-winning *Tiki: Modern Tropical Cocktails*; and **Maricel Presilla**, Ph.D., an award-winning author, culinary historian, chef, restaurateur, and a widely recognized expert on Latin American cuisine.

- **Juneteenth Weekend**

- *Saturday, June 17–Monday, June 19, 2023; 12–5 p.m.; Edible Academy*

- The Juneteenth Weekend lineup at NYBG's state-of-the-art Edible Academy campus includes hands-on gardening, crafts, and exploration. Cooking demonstrations will feature special guests and the crops of the *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience*.

- **Gardening Activities**

- Visitors can enjoy drop-in, hands-on activities, such as planting and tending crops and potting up collard greens to grow and enjoy at home. The Edible Academy's Global Gardeners will talk about their foodways such as what they are growing in their gardens and their culinary traditions.

- **Maker Station**

- At hands-on activity stations in the Solar Pavilion, visitors can decorate a harvest bag with colorful garden and vegetable-themed stamps and mix and measure teas using crops from the *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience*, such as roselle, lemongrass, and more.

- **Culinary Demonstrations**

- *12:30, 2, and 3:30 p.m.; Pauline Gillespie Gossett Overlook Pavilion*

- Ongoing culinary demonstrations are presented by local chefs and culinary educators, featuring seasonal crops from the garden that will inspire chefs of all ages. Recipes are shared following each workshop.

- **Celebrate Juneteenth**

- In the Edible Academy Technology lab in the Edible Academy Classroom Building, visitors can learn more about the crops featured in *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience* and their uses now and throughout history with Black herbalist Journei Bimwala, and a selection of books will chronicle the history and celebration of Juneteenth. Samples of a refreshing traditional red Juneteenth beverage will be available at the drink stand in the African American Garden.

- **Tours & Family Fun**

- At 1:30 and 2:30 p.m., NYBG tour guides lead tours of the *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience*. At 1 and 3 p.m. on the Edible Academy Event Lawn, the Harambee Dance Company gives drum and dance performances that incorporate traditional and contemporary African styles.

- **Make a Pan-African Flag**

Saturday, June 17 and Sunday, June 18, 2023; 10 a.m.–5:30 p.m.; Everett Children's Adventure Garden

Visitors can learn about the Pan-African Flag and its significance and make a mini-flag from popsicle sticks. Supplies are available on a first-come, first-serve basis

- **Mertz Library Display**

Tuesdays–Fridays, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; LuEsther T. Mertz Library

Throughout June, the Mertz Library is featuring items for visitors to read during their visit, including *Freewater* by Amina Luqman-Dawson and *Nature Swagger: Stories and Visions of Black Joy in the Outdoors* by Rue Mapp.

- **NYBG Shop**

Throughout the Juneteenth weekend, stop by in person or visit [NYBG Shop](#) online for a selection of books from celebrated authors, selected for visitors of all ages.

African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience Sample Plant List

The following is a selection of the more than 140 plant varieties that visitors will see growing in *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience*.

Bed 1: Cane

- Five varieties of sugarcane

Bed 2: Roots

- Yams (multiple varieties)
- Sweet potato
- Plantain
- Cassava
- Taro

Bed 3: Stewpot

- Rice (multiple varieties)
- Black beans
- Kidney beans
- Callaloo
- Okra
- Tomatoes (multiple varieties)
- Calabaza squash

Bed 4: Flavor

- Parsley
- Peppers (multiple varieties)
- Cilantro
- Turmeric

- Ginger
- Cinnamon
- Black pepper

Bed 5: Creativity

- Indigo
- Bottle gourd
- Cotton
- Shoeblack hibiscus
- Prickly pear

Bed 6: Abundance

- Corn
- Mango
- Barbados cherry
- Sweetsop
- Tobacco
- Peanut
- Pineapple
- Coconut

Bed 7: Remedies

- Sage
- Rosemary
- Lemongrass
- Aloe
- Lemon verbena
- Spearmint

Bed 8: Transformation

- Yams (multiple varieties)
- Rice (multiple varieties)
- Sorrel
- Pigeon peas
- Field peas

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LuESTHER T. MERTZ CHARITABLE TRUST:
 Providing leadership support for year-round programming at NYBG

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The New York Botanical Garden is located at 2900 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York 10458. For more information, visit nybg.org

The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden's general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.

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