

NYBG

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 30, 2023

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, and Featuring a Poetry Walk with Works by Afro-Caribbean Poets, *The Caribbean Experience* is on View through Wednesday, November 1, 2023



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, *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. 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 includes 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 features 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 Dorcely, 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, where a traditional red beverage will be available from 1 to 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/>

***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

The African American Garden is made possible with support from the Mellon Foundation.

Generous support provided by The Charles E. Culpeper Arts & Culture Program of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

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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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