

**Guaiacum officinale**



# Guaiacum officinale L.

# ZYGOPHYLLACEAE

Common Name: **Lignum Vitae**

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# Dense-crowned gnarled tree up to 8 metres tall. Continental tropical America, West Indies, introduced into the Old World tropics. Lignum Vitae is the national flower of Jamaica.

**Kingston, St. Andrew, St. Catherine, Clarendon, Manchester, St. Elizabeth, Trelawny, St. Thomas**

HABITAT: Arid limestone hills of the south coast, alluvial plains, locally common, often planted; sea level-250 metres.

BARK: Mottled green and white, flaking, leaving circular patches of concentric rings; blaze thin, to 3 mm thick; slash hard, outer edge green, inner band yellow-green, grainy.

LEAVES: Evenly bipinnate; leaflets glabrous, leathery, **2 (3) pairs**, sessile, obovate-elliptical, 1.5-3.5 (6) cm long, and 2.5 (3.5) cm broad; stipules 1 mm long.

FLOWERS: Peduncles 1-flowered, few or clustered in the distal leaf-axils; sepals tomentose, 4-5 mm long; petals puberulous, usually **purple-blue**, 12 mm long; stamens 10. Flowering mostly during dry weather, December to April, June to September.

FRUIT: Capsule fleshy, **yellow**, with **red seeds**, usually 2-segments, 1.5-2 cm long. Fruiting May to February.

WOOD: Sapwood pale yellow; heartwood dark greenish-brown, fine and even in grain, dense, tough, hard and very heavy, weighing 1,217-1,330 kg/m<sup>3</sup> (specific gravity 1.22-1.33), reportedly will not split.

USES: Ornamental, shade; wheels and cogs for mills, pulley blocks, pestles, cutting boards, rulers, batons, bowls and other turnery purposes, propellor shaft bushings in ships.