

Roots of Identity: Jamaica's Parish Trees and Their Stories

In May 2023, each parish was designated a tree that is and has been critical to its local ecosystem and economic sustainability. This initiative aims to raise awareness about the value and importance of trees by highlighting the significance of particular trees to the ecological, economical and cultural development of each parish.

Jamaica's natural heritage is deeply rooted—quite literally—in the trees that define each parish. These parish trees are more than botanical symbols; they reflect history, culture, traditional uses, and the ecological richness of the island. From towering forest giants to trees prized for medicine, craft, and food, each parish tree tells a unique Jamaican story.

Here are the Parish Trees for the 14 parishes of Jamaica:

St. Ann – Santa Maria (*Calophyllum calaba*)

Known locally as Santa Maria, this stately hardwood is valued for its durable timber and traditional medicinal uses. In St. Ann—the “Garden Parish”—the Santa Maria reflects resilience and long-standing ties to rural livelihoods and craftsmanship.

Kingston – Yellow Poui (*Tabebuia serratifolia*)

When in bloom, the Yellow Poui transforms Kingston's urban landscape into a blaze of golden colour. It symbolizes beauty, renewal, and hope, offering a striking contrast to the capital city's concrete skyline.

St. Andrew – West Indian Mahogany (*Swietenia mahagonii*)

Often called Jamaican Mahogany, this world-renowned hardwood represents strength, prestige, and economic history. Its fine grain and durability made it one of Jamaica's most famous exports.

Clarendon – Braziletto (*Peltophorum linnaei* / *Coulteria linnei*)

Braziletto is a dense, richly coloured wood traditionally used for furniture and charcoal. In Clarendon, it reflects endurance and the parish's strong agricultural and craft traditions.

Trelawny – Gold Spoon (*Antirhea jamaicensis*)

Endemic to Jamaica, Gold Spoon is admired for its hard wood and traditional medicinal uses. Its selection highlights Trelawny's rich biodiversity and strong connection to native forest species.

St. Mary – Annatto (*Bixa orellana*)

Annatto is best known for its bright red seeds, used as a natural food colouring and in traditional remedies. In St. Mary, it symbolizes creativity, culture, and the blending of food and folk traditions.

Hanover – Red Nickel (*Ormosia jamaicensis*)

This tree is famous for its striking red seeds, often used in jewellery and ornamentation. Red Nickel reflects Hanover’s natural beauty and the artistic use of forest products.

Manchester – Spicewood (*Ocotea staminea*)

Spicewood is valued for its aromatic qualities and medicinal uses. Its association with Manchester speaks to the parish’s cooler climate and long-standing traditions of herbal medicine.

Westmoreland – Royal Palm (*Roystonea princeps*)

Tall, elegant, and unmistakable, the Royal Palm is a symbol of pride and dignity. In Westmoreland, it reflects openness, strength, and the parish’s sweeping plains and coastal landscapes.

St. Catherine – Lignum Vitae (*Guaiaacum officinale*)

Renowned as one of the hardest woods in the world, Lignum Vitae is Jamaica’s national flower tree and St. Catherine’s parish tree. It represents endurance, healing, and national identity.

St. James – Cotton Tree (*Ceiba pentandra*)

A massive and culturally significant tree, the Cotton Tree has long been associated with spiritual beliefs and community gathering. In St. James, it symbolizes protection and ancestral heritage.

St. Thomas – Breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*)

Introduced to Jamaica in the 18th century, breadfruit became a staple food crop. As St. Thomas’s parish tree, it represents sustenance, survival, and food security.

Portland – Water Mahoe (*Hibiscus elatus*)

Water Mahoe, with its changing flower colours and strong timber, is Jamaica’s national tree. In lush Portland, it reflects natural beauty, adaptability, and national pride.

St. Elizabeth – Logwood (*Haematoxylum campechianum*)

Once central to Jamaica’s dye industry, Logwood played a significant role in colonial trade. Its designation honours St. Elizabeth’s dry forests and its place in the island’s economic history.

A Living Legacy

Together, Jamaica’s parish trees form a living map of the island’s ecological and cultural heritage. Protecting these species means safeguarding stories, traditions, and ecosystems for future generations—ensuring that Jamaica’s roots remain strong and deeply grounded in nature.