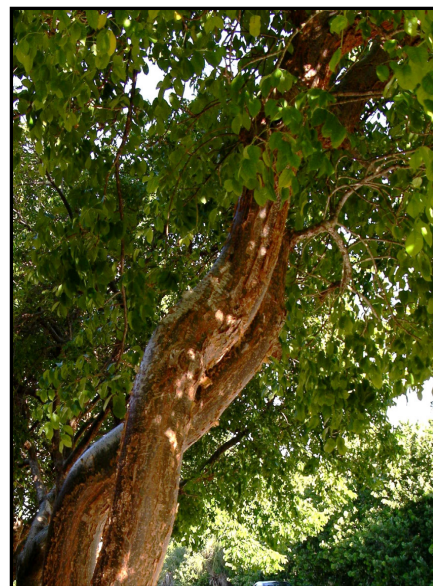


Nature Notes

...from Sharon

Gumbo Limbo (*Bursera simaruba*)

One of the first trees you see approaching the first parking area in the Preserve is the Gumbo Limbo. (Look for the trees on the east side of the Learning Center.) Gumbo Limbo is very fast growing, tolerant of salt and calcareous soils, and has an attractive reddish bark that peels away in thin flakes to reveal a smooth and sinuous green-gray underbark. It thrives with little or no care. It occurs naturally in coastal hammocks in south Florida above the mangrove zone. It is considered one of the most wind-tolerant trees and it is recommended as a rugged, hurricane-resistant species. It is a great summertime shade tree for local yards, as well as a beautiful specimen plant. The trees are easily propagated by seeds or cuttings. In fact, early pioneers created living fences by simply sticking branches close together in the ground.



Semi-deciduous, it loses all its leaves in early spring just before the new leaves appear. It can grow to 30 feet or more. The leaves are spirally arranged and pinnate with 7-11 ovate leaflets. It has tiny green flowers followed by a fruit that is football-shaped and about ½ inch in diameter. Fruits turn from green to deep red when ripe. This fruit is loved by many birds and other wildlife. Some fruits are present year-round, but the main fruiting season is March and April in the northern part of the plant's range. The tree on the north side of the Learning Center is currently full of fruit. The fruits are a small three-valved capsule encasing a single seed which is covered in a red fatty



aril (seedcoat). Birds seek out the fruit to feed on the aril, which though small is rich in lipids. Arils are an important food source for local as well as winter migrating birds.

Before modern medicine developed laboratory drugs, our ancestors all over the world used certain herbs and weeds for health. In many parts of the world today, they are the only treatment available and sometimes work better than synthetic drugs.

Many plants exhibit the "Doctrine of Signatures" which is a concept that there is some physical characteristic about a plant that signals what it

could be used for on the physical body. One great example of this concept is the red peeling bark of the Gumbo Limbo, sometimes referred to as the "Sunburned Tourist" tree. Parts of this tree have been used to effectively treat poisonwood exposure, sunburn, insect bites, and many other skin related problem. Strips of bark were boiled in water and then used topically for skin sores, measles, sunburn, insect bites, and rashes. The tree is a member of the same botanical species as frankincense and myrrh, both representatives of the world's oldest medicines. The gummy, turpentine-scented resin has been used in the West Indies for making glue, varnish, liniments, and as a coating for canoes. The wood carves well and was preferred in carving carousel horses. It is also the source of that very, very soft and light wood used for making toy airplanes and boats. In that form it is called balsa wood. It is also used to make other small wood products such as matchsticks, toothpicks, and crates. The Glades Indians used the glue-like sap of gumbo limbo boiled with water to make bird-lime. Small birds were captured by the ancient method of using bird-lime. This technique consists of putting sticky bird-lime on a favored perch. When this material was spread on a branch, any bird landing on the site became stuck. The hunters removed the birds carefully and placed them in cages. Some were eaten; others were sold or bartered.

