

## West Indian Weed Woman

Recorded by Bill Rogers in 1934

*One day I met an old woman selling,  
And I wanted something to eat.  
I say I was going to put a bit in she way,  
But I turn back when I meet.  
I thought she had bananas, orange or pear,  
But was nothing that I need.  
For when I asked the old woman what she was selling,  
She said she was selling weed.*

*She had she coat tie up over she waist,  
And was stepping along with grace.  
She had on an old pair of clogs on her feet,  
And was wriggling down the street.  
Just then she started to name the different weeds,  
And I really was more than glad.  
But I can't remember all that she call,  
But these were a few she had.*

*Man Piaba, Woman Piaba,  
Tantan Fall Back and Lemon Grass,  
Minnie Root, Gully Root, Granny-Backbone, Bitter Tally, Lime Leaf, and Toro,  
Coolie Bitters, Karile Bush, Flat o' the Earth, and Iron Weed,  
Sweet Broom, Fowl Tongue, Wild Daisy, Sweet Sage and even Toyo.*

*She had Cassava Mumma, Cocoo Piaba, Jacob's Ladder, and Piti Guano,  
Fingle Bush, Job's Tear, Piti Payi, a Jumbie Bottle, and White Cleary,  
Bile Bush, Wild Cane, Duck Weed, Aniseed, Wara Bitters, and Wild Gray Root.  
She even had down to a certain bush Barbajans does call Puss in Boot.*

*When I hear how much bush she had,  
I left dumb till I couldn't even talk.  
She started to call from Camp Street corner,  
And never stop 'til she reached Orange Walk.  
The woman had me so surprised  
that I didn't know what to do,  
That a girl come and gimme a cuff in meh eye,  
And I didn't even know was who.*

*Sweet Broom, Sweet Sage, and Lemon Grass,  
I hear them good for making tea.  
Oh well, I hear Zèb Grass and Wild Daisy  
is good to cool the body.  
The woman tongue was even lisped,  
And she was calling out all the time.  
She even had a little kanwa eye,  
And the other that left was blind.*

*She had Bitter Guma, Portugee Bumboh, Congo Lana, and Twelve o' Clock Broom,  
Sarsparilla, Wild Tomato, Soursop Leaf, and Half-a-bit Weed,  
Yura Bally, Sweet Pinpota Bush, White Fleary, and Christmas Bush,  
Cockshun and Sand Bitters, and even Monkey Ladder, and all the rest you may need.*

*She had Fat Bush, Elder Bush, Black Pepper Bush, French Toyo, Qupera, and Capadulla,  
Tamarind Leaf, Money Bush, Soldier Fork Leaf, Pumpkin Blossom, and even Devil Dua,  
Leeman, Congo Pom, Pingalor, Physic Nut, and Lily Root.  
In fact, the only bush that she didn't got  
was Bush in he everyday suit!*

Lyrics transcription by Erneslyn Velasco and Lawrence Waldron

# West Indian Weed Woman

## Plant medicine in calypso music



Sweet Sage  
(*Lantana camara*)



Devil Dua  
(*Strychnos* sp.)



Fingle Bush  
(*Clethra alnifolia*)



Fat Bush  
(*Eryngium aquaticum*)



Woman Piaba  
(*Leonurus sibiricus*)



Toyo  
(*Justicia pectoralis*)



Yura Bally  
(*Chelonanthus alatus*)



Cockshun  
(*Smilax schomburgkiana*)



Minnie Root  
(*Ruellia tuberosa*)



Wild Daisy  
(*Sphagneticola trilobata*)



Wild Tomato  
(*Physalis angulata*)



Sweet Broom  
(*Scoparia dulcis*)

Calypso music began in Trinidad and became popular throughout the Caribbean. Calypso songs are often funny, and many deal with current events, cultural traditions or everyday life in creative and amusing ways. The song “West Indian Weed Woman” draws humor from the huge assortment of herbal medicines the woman is selling. Over 60 plants and cures are mentioned by name in the version made popular by Guyanese singer Bill Rogers in the 1930s.

This song both draws from and helps preserve Caribbean traditions. The medical knowledge and plant names are Caribbean, making the song topical for Caribbean listeners. It describes a female plant medicine expert. Historically, many skilled healers in the Caribbean were women. The recording itself is a way of documenting important herbal medicine traditions.

Recent analysis of this song found that about 80% of the plants that could be identified are native to the Caribbean. This shows it is likely that Amerindian plant knowledge was adopted by Afro-Caribbean healers, becoming a key part of Caribbean culture to this day.

For more information, read *West Indian Weed Woman: Indigenous Origins of West Indian Folk Medicine* by Erneslyn Velasco and Lawrence Waldron, published in the proceedings of the 27th International Association for Caribbean Archaeology Congress.

La musique calypso a commencé à Trinité et est devenue populaire dans les Caraïbes. Les chansons de calypso sont souvent drôles et beaucoup traitent de l'actualité, des traditions culturelles ou de la vie quotidienne de manière créative et amusante. La chanson « West Indian Weed Woman » tire l'humour de l'énorme assortiment de plantes médicinales vendu par la dame. Plus de 60 plantes et remèdes sont mentionnées par leur nom dans la version rendue populaire par le chanteur guyanais Bill Rogers dans les années 1930.

Cette chanson à la fois puise dans les traditions des Caraïbes et aide à les préserver. Les connaissances médicales et les noms des plantes sont Caraïbéens, ce qui la rend pertinente pour les auditeurs Caraïbéens. Elle dépeint une femme experte en médecine des plantes. L'enregistrement lui-même est un moyen de documenter les traditions médicinales.

Une analyse récente de cette chanson a révélé qu'environ 80% des plantes identifiables sont originaires des Caraïbes. Cela montre qu'il est probable que la connaissance Amérindienne des plantes a été adoptée par les guérisseurs Afro-Caraïbéens, devenant à ce jour un élément clé de la culture Caraïbéenne.

Pour plus d'informations, lisez *West Indian Weed Woman: Indigenous Origins of West Indian Folk Medicine* par Erneslyn Velasco et Lawrence Waldron, publié dans les actes du 27<sup>e</sup> Congrès de l'International Association for Caribbean Archaeology.