

Manchineel Tree Advisory

The manchineel tree (Species: *Hippomane mancinella*, Family: *Euphorbiaceae*) got its name from the Spanish 'manzanilla' which means 'little apple.' The fruit and leaves of the tree resemble those of an apple tree. However, the manchineel tree is a very poisonous plant and should be avoided as far as possible. It has a reputation as being the most dangerous tree around.

Description and Habitat

The manchineel is a tree reaching up to 15 meters high with a grayish bark, shiny green leaves and spikes of small greenish flowers. Its fruits are green or greenish-yellow when ripe.

The manchineel tree can be found near to (and on) coastal beaches throughout the Caribbean and in Central America. It provides excellent natural windbreaks and its roots stabilize the sand, thus helping to prevent beach erosion.

How Poisonous is it?

Contact with the manchineel tree can cause severe medical problems. The milky sap causes blistering, burns, and inflammation when in contact with the skin, mucous membranes, and eyes.



- The leaves, bark, sap and fruit of the tree are all poisonous. Contact with any of these causes contact dermatitis symptomized by painful blisters.
- Eating the fruit, which has a very sweet smell and a pleasant taste, can be deadly. Swallowing even a tiny amount of the fruit will cause blisters and swelling in the mouth and throat.
- Standing under the tree is hazardous if it is raining. The water passing through the leaves and fruit will cause burns and blisters if it comes in contact with your skin.
- Cutting this tree will cause the sap to squirt. Contact with this will cause blisters.
- Burning this tree results in the sap being carried in the smoke and this will affect the eyes and skin of people in the vicinity. If sap (or smoke from the burning tree) enters the eyes it can lead to blindness.
- Carib Indians used the sap of this tree to poison their darts and were known to poison the water supply of their enemies with the leaves. As a form of torture they would tie victims to this tree and leave them exposed

Warning!

In some places the tree carries a warning sign alerting people to the dangers. In other places, a red 'X' painted on the trunk serves as a warning. Despite this, many people are treated every year after some sort of contact with this tree. Children, especially, need to be warned. After all, they can easily be fooled by the sweet-smelling, plum-sized fruit.

So, if you see a manchineel tree anywhere on Saba - do not touch it, do not put your chair under it and do not shelter under it when it rains.

Most importantly, do not let your children near it!

For more information, please contact the Saba Conservation Foundation at (599) 416-3295/5716 or email us at info@sabapark.org

