



Tree of life or Lignum vitae



Plant Botanical Name:

Guaiacum officinale

USBG Plant Location:

Conservatory

Conservatory Room Location:

Garden Court

Plant Threat Level:

Endangered

Before polymers, alloys and composites, the wood of *Guaiacum officinale*, also known as tree of life, was extremely important due to its combination of strength, toughness and density. The common name, *Lignum vitae* (tree of life or wood of life), comes from its historic medicinal use as a remedy for conditions from arthritis to coughs to syphilis. These uses caused over harvesting, reducing native populations to the point that *Lignum vitae* is now listed as "Endangered" by IUCN (The World Conservation Union). It is native to most of the Caribbean (including Key West), a 'biodiversity hotspot' that supports exceptionally diverse ecosystems. Most of its native habitat has been devastated by deforestation and development.

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