



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 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 cancer. Over-harvesting for medicinal uses caused over harvesting, reducing native populations to the point that *Lignum vitae* is now listed as "Endangered" by IUCN (The World Conservation Union). The plant is native to the Caribbean (including Key West), a 'biodiversity hotspot' that supports exceptionally diverse ecosystems. Most of its native habitat has been devastated by human development.

Source URL: <https://www.usbg.gov/plants/tree-life-or-lignum-vitae>