

Weird and Wonderful by Fran Benton

When I travel I always look for weird and wonderful plants to entertain you. This year has produced two stars. Number one weirdo is the Brazilian Grape Tree Jaboticaba. This tree has really tasty purple fruit that it produces *on its trunk*. Yes, this is one weird tree. I met my first one in the town of Holuloa on the big island of Hawaii. This is an artist's town with tons of little galleries. While chatting with one gallery owner I asked about an odd plant he had outside. "Weird?" He said, "I'll show you weird. This is the Jaboticaba. It grows its fruit on its trunk- taste it! And they taste like Concord grapes. It's a great favourite in the tropics for making jams and jellies."



With a bit of research I found out something entirely new to me. The ability to produce fruit on your trunk is known as being califlorous. Think stalks of Brussels sprouts. Why would any plant be califlorous? Incidentally, cauliflower is not califlorous. What? Don't you love botany? One plant we all know and love is the fig.

Figs are califlorous as they produce their flowers and fruit on their stems. Some gourds like the famed calabash produce fruit on their trunk. But why do they do this? It turns out that mammals, insects, bats, and some birds that crawl up trees are great pollinators if the fruit and flowers are on the stem or trunk of a tree.

I bought some jaboticaba fruit at our local fruit stand. It was too pricy to make jam but I thought it would be excellent in fruit salad. It was and there was a bit left over for the next day. Hmm, would I be over sharing if I mentioned that day old Jaboticaba was a *gastronomical* experience? Note to self. Fresh only, tasty but dangerous!

My other weird plant is called Cup of Gold (*Solandra maxima*). It has the biggest flower I have ever seen. It's a huge thing rivaling the blooms on *Magnolia grandiflora*. I found some on the highway and decided to take a closer look. They truly are monsters but like so many glorious



yellow things (think Scotch broom) they are invasive in the tropics. They are also a vine and tend to climb over plants that you'd rather they leave alone. And to add to the downside they are quite toxic, belonging to the family of poisons that includes *Datura* and *Brugmansia*. Why are pretty things in the plant world so often toxic?

Well, back to raiding the

neighbour's papaya tree. That's one tasty fruit!