

Your Guide to

Spice Garden Trail

in Fort Canning Park

This walking trail takes you to some of the interesting herb and spice plants in Fort Canning Park's Spice Garden, as well as a number of historical landmarks along the way.

In 1822, Sir Stamford Raffles, a keen naturalist, set up the first botanical and experimental garden in Singapore on Government Hill (present-day Fort Canning Park).

Raffles aimed to introduce the cultivation of economic crops in Singapore. The garden started out with 125 nutmeg trees, 1,000 nutmeg seeds and 450 clove trees. These early introductions had formed the foundation of Singapore's spice plantations, which dominated the island landscape for the next 35 years.



Difficulty level: Moderate



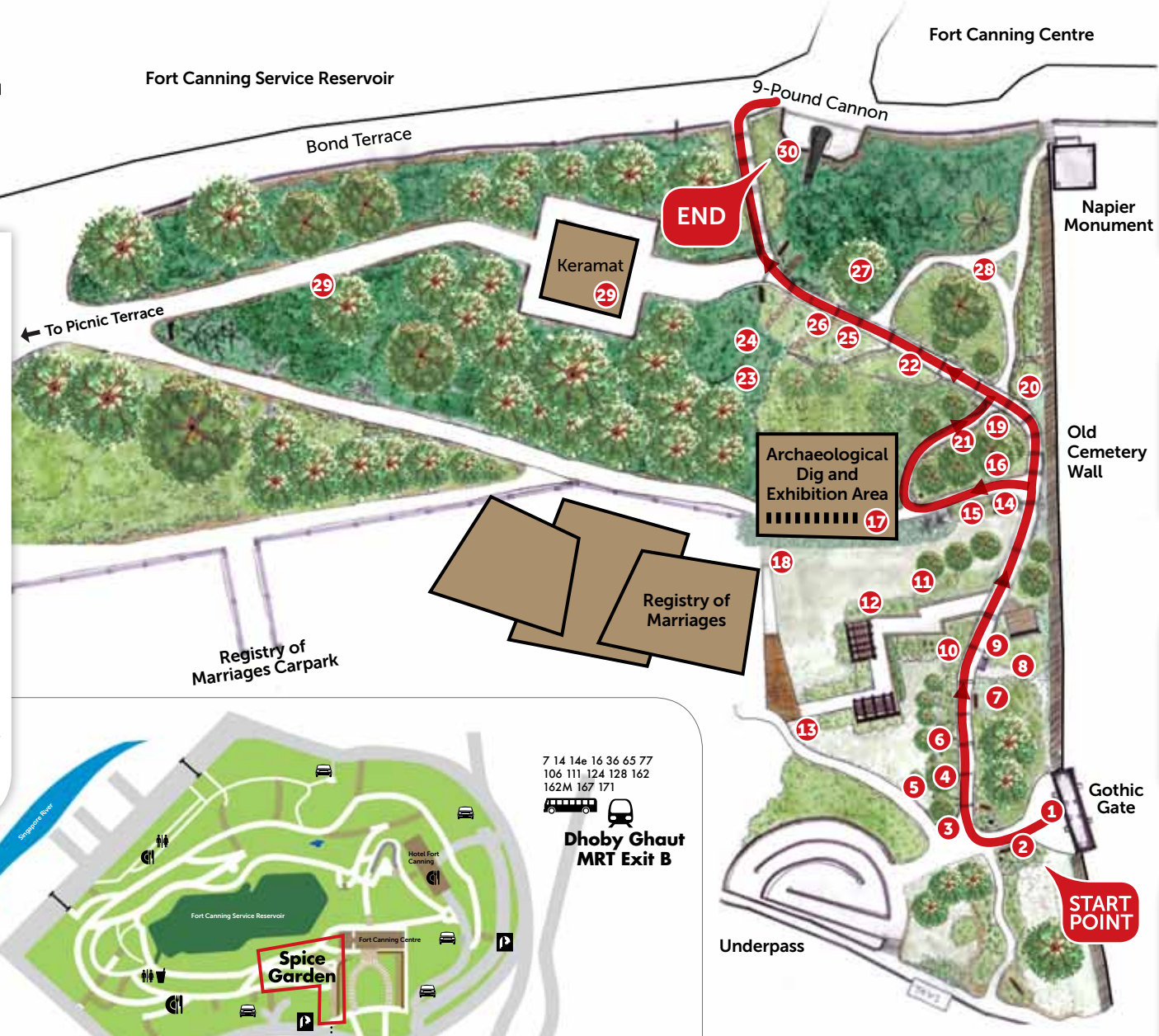
Distance: 1km



Walking time: 30min



- Legend**
- Tarmac Road
 - Track
 - Staircase/Steps
 - Escalator
 - Building
 - Carpark
 - Old Cemetery Wall
 - Toilet
 - Restaurant
 - Vending Machine
 - Pedestrian Underpass
 - MRT Station



27 Asam Gelugor



28 Tamarind



22 Roselle



26 Thai Basil



14 Curry Tree



16 Cinnamon



2 Nutmeg



5 Black Pepper



Enlarged Spice Garden Map

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 in Fort Canning Park





1. Gothic Gate



2. Nutmeg



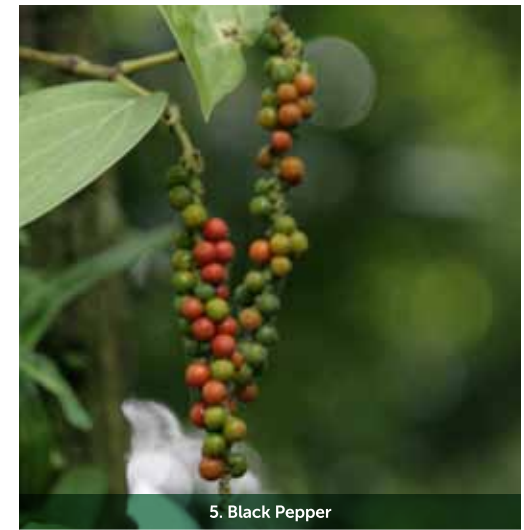
Nutmeg Fruit



3. Mint



4. Allspice



5. Black Pepper



6. Laksa Leaf

START POINT

▶ 1 Gothic Gate

This grand, white Gothic gate welcomes you at the border of the Spice Garden. It is one of a pair of Gothic gates marking the entrance to Singapore's first Christian cemetery (present-day Fort Canning Green), which was used from 1822 to 1865. The gates were designed by Superintending Engineer Captain Charles Edward Faber, whom Mount Faber was named after.

▶ 2 Nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*)

An evergreen tree native to the Moluccas region of Indonesia, the Nutmeg tree can grow to about 10m tall. Its flowers are small and have a faint fragrance. The tree produces large, oval fruits that yield two distinct spices, nutmeg and mace. The nutmeg spice is derived from the hard, brown-black seed while mace is derived from the fruit's aril, the red lacy seed covering.

Owing to their strong flavour, both spices are used in baking and to season sweet and savoury dishes in Asia.

Nutmeg is also used in the perfume industry. Medically, it is used as a stimulant and helps relieve air in the bowels. It can also be sucked or chewed to counter motion sickness.

▶ 3 Mint (*Mentha arvensis*)

Mint is a herbaceous (non-woody) plant with dark-green leaves best known for its refreshing taste and smell. There are many species of mint from the same family, sharing those same characteristics.

Owing to its pleasant taste and smell, Mint is used as a herb in many culinary recipes.

The oil extracted from the leaves is also often used as a freshener in everyday products like toothpaste and sweets.

Mint is known to aid digestion and contain health benefits. It also has antiseptic properties and is used to clean wounds.

▶ 4 Allspice (*Pimenta dioica*)

Allspice is an evergreen tree discovered in the 16th century by Spanish explorers who mistook it for Black Pepper.

Its leaves are dark green, glossy, leathery and fragrant. Its berries are reddish brown in colour. The leaves and fruits give off a distinct aroma reminiscent of cloves, nutmeg, pepper and cinnamon.

Allspice is used in many recipes for cakes and biscuits and is one of the ingredients in mixed spice. It is sometimes used as a substitute for cloves. Its oil is used in perfumes and cosmetics.

▶ 5 Black Pepper (*Piper nigrum*)

This woody climber produces spikes of berry-like fruits, giving rise to pepper, the most popular and widely used spice in the world.

In the past pepper was worth more than gold and was the world's most traded spice. Trade routes were fiercely protected and empires were built and destroyed because of pepper.

The plant's fruits can either be used whole or ground into powder. They are available as green, red, black and white pepper, depending on when the fruits are picked and how they are treated. For cooking, freshly ground pepper gives the fullest flavour.

Pepper can be used to aid digestion, stimulate appetite and relieve nausea.

▶ 6 Laksa Leaf, Daun Kesum (*Polygonum odoratum*)

A native of Southeast Asia, this herb not only grows wild in ditches and banks of streams and ponds, it can also be grown easily in a pot.

This herb has a very strong flavour and is such an intrinsic part of the famous local dish *laksa* that it is also known as *Daun Laksa* ('laksa leaf' in Malay).

In Vietnamese cuisine, it is usually served uncooked. It is used in salads or eaten as a fresh herb with the popular Vietnamese spring rolls. In Thailand, it is eaten raw with spicy dips.

Other than its culinary uses, Laksa Leaf is also a medicinal plant. Poultice (a soft, moist mass) made from the plant can be applied to relieve swelling and inflammation, while a decoction of the whole plant can be used to treat skin itch, diarrhoea and excessive bleeding.



7. Cardamom



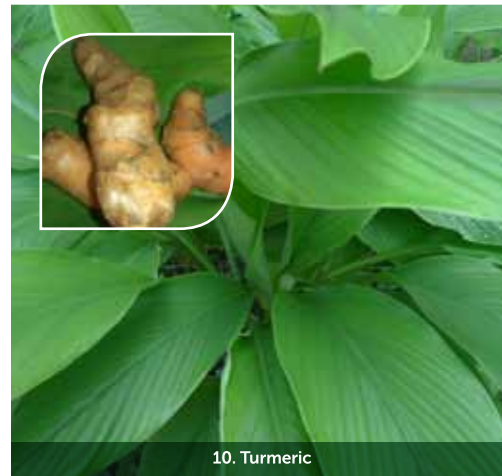
8. Clove



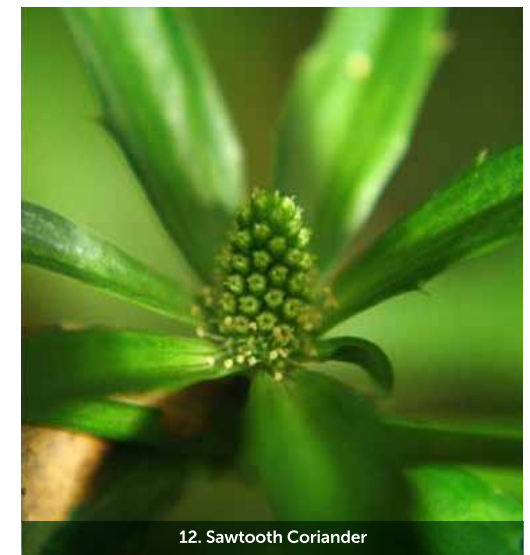
9. Wild Pepper



11. Neem Tree



10. Turmeric



12. Sawtooth Coriander

► **7 Cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*)**

Belonging to the extensive ginger family, this plant loves shade and its flowers grow on stems close to the ground.

The fruit pods or capsules form after pollination. To obtain spices of the highest quality, the pods have to be harvested just before maturity.

Cardamom has a pungent flavour and should be used sparingly. It is used in both sweet and savoury foods. In India, it is an essential component in many spice mixes and an important ingredient in many local dishes.

In Ayurveda (traditional Indian medicine), the spice is used as a digestive aid, congestion reliever and for detoxification.

► **8 Clove (*Syzygium aromaticum*)**

This evergreen tree has a bushy, conical crown and can grow up to 10m. Once a highly prized spice, cloves are derived from the flower buds of this tree. The buds grow in clusters and turn from pale yellow to green and finally to bright red when they are ready for harvesting.

Cloves are used in desserts as well as savoury dishes. They are added to spice bread and cakes, fruit juices and cocktails. They can also be chewed to freshen the breath.

Cloves are used to make Indonesian *kretek* cigarettes, which contain a blend of tobacco and the spice. Dried cloves also make excellent air fresheners.

Clove oil relieves toothaches and has potent antiseptic properties. It is used as a painkiller and as a temporary dental filling.

► **9 Wild Pepper, Daun Kadok (*Piper sarmentosum*)**

Wild Pepper is a fast-growing spreading vine with waxy, heart-shaped leaves that are dark green in colour.

The leaves are frequently confused with those of Betel (*Piper betle*), which belongs to the same genus but has paler, less glossy and longer leaves.

In Asian cuisine, like Thai, Vietnamese, or Peranakan food, the leaves are eaten fresh as wraps in salads or desserts. The leaves and roots of Wild Pepper are known to be able to treat toothaches, digestive disorders, cough, eczema and asthma.

► **10 Turmeric, Kunyit (*Curcuma longa*)**

Another member of the ginger family, Turmeric is a very important spice in Asia today. Native to South and Southeast Asia, this perennial plant is also known as Yellow Ginger because of its orange-yellow rhizome (underground stem).

Turmeric has been used as a substitute for saffron and was even known as Indian Saffron. It can be boiled, dried, peeled or ground. Turmeric is used to flavour all kinds of dishes and is a key component of curry powder.

In India, Turmeric is used to dye textiles into a deep, rich yellow. It also features in many traditional healthcare practices of Asian cultures, including Ayurveda (Indian) and Jamu (Indonesian).

► **11 Neem Tree (*Azadirachta indica*)**

The botanical name of this tree is derived from the Persian word *azadhirakt* (meaning 'noble tree'). Hindu devotees carry its leaves when they walk across glowing coals during the Theemithi Festival. Hindus also include the flowers in their New Year's feast as the flowering coincides with the festival.

All parts of the tree are used in different concoctions for reducing inflammation, clearing toxins, promoting healing and improving general bodily functions. It is also believed to aid conditions including chicken pox, diabetes and cancer. Due to its many medicinal uses, the plant is termed the 'village pharmacy' or 'miracle plant'.

Neem oil, harvested from the tree's seeds, is used in cosmetics and its twigs are used for toothbrushes in India. It is also a safe and natural pesticide.

► **12 Sawtooth Coriander (*Eryngium foetidum*)**

This erect perennial (a plant that lives for more than two years) is native to Central and South America and can grow to about 80cm tall. It was introduced by Chinese traders into Southeast Asia as a substitute for coriander.

The herb is often planted near doorways because its scent is believed to repel snakes.

Besides flavouring food, young Sawtooth Coriander leaves are eaten raw or cooked as a vegetable. In its native country, a decoction of the whole plant is taken to lower blood pressure and as an aphrodisiac.



13. Chilli

► **13 Chilli** (*Capsicum* sp.)

Chilli was one of the plants Christopher Columbus discovered in his explorations and possibly one of the oldest cultivated plants in the Americas. Species and cultivars vary in size and appearance.

Fresh Chilli fruits are green and subsequently turn red, yellow, brown, purple or almost black when ripe, depending on the variety. Heat levels also vary according to plant variety.

Dried or powdered Chilli is commonly sold in markets and used in cooking. The tiny, fiery-hot Bird's Eye Chilli (a cultivar of *Capsicum annum*), or *Cili Padi* in Malay, is another regional favourite. These are pounded and added to fresh sambal and side dishes for an added punch of spiciness.

► **14 Curry Tree** (*Murraya koenigii*)

This small, evergreen tree belongs to the citrus family. Leaves are harvested for culinary purposes, owing to their aromatic properties, which are believed to stimulate taste buds.

Curry leaves do not taste like curry. Instead, its name is derived from it being used in curries, especially in southern India. They are best fried in oil at the start of curry making to extract the flavour fully. Leaves can be kept in plastic bags and frozen for use at a later time.

The Curry Tree is also a host plant to the Common Mormon (*Papilio polytes*) butterfly.



14. Curry Tree



15. Kaffir Lime

► **15 Kaffir Lime** (*Citrus hystrix*)

This shrubby, evergreen tree native to Southeast Asia has distinctively shaped 'double' leaves. The upper side of the leaves is dark green and glossy while the underside is a lighter matte green. The plant also emits a zesty scent.

Its fruits are pear-shaped and bumpy. The juice they yield is sour and is thus seldom used. Only the rind is used for Lao and Thai curry pastes.

Fresh Kaffir Lime leaves are chopped thinly and added to soups, salads, curries and other dishes such as stir-fried vegetables and recipes containing coconut cream.



16. Cinnamon



17. Archaeological Dig

► **16 Cinnamon** (*Cinnamomum verum*)

The Cinnamon tree is an evergreen plant that grows up to 15m. It is native to India and Sri Lanka. It has greenish flowers with a distinct odour. The inner bark of the tree is dried to form cinnamon sticks.

Cinnamon flavours both sweet and savoury foods. It is commonly used in desserts such as buns, pies, tarts, puffs and candies. In Asia, Cinnamon is a component of the Chinese five-spice powder. It is also used in Indian *garam masala* ('aromatic spice blend' in Hindi) and in masala tea.

Cinnamon has been discovered to possess anti-viral properties. Research has also suggested that Cinnamon can target colorectal cancer.

► **17 Archaeological Dig and Exhibition Area**

To the side and down a brick path, you will find an archaeological dig and exhibition area.

On display are several 14th-century artefacts uncovered by researchers on this very site. These artefacts show that, long before the arrival of the British in 1819, Chinese merchants were already travelling to this part of the world to engage in trade.

The artefacts also suggest that the site was used by palace craftsmen to manufacture glass and gold items.



18. Torch Ginger

► **18 Torch Ginger, Bunga Kantan** (*Etlingera elatior*)

Torch Ginger is a member of the ginger family with bright-pink, red and white inflorescence. The plant grows in large clumps and typically reaches a height of about 3m.

Its common name, Torch Ginger, is derived from the attractive inflorescences that resemble flaming torches. The young, unopened inflorescence is often used to add flavour to *rojak* and *laksa* – popular dishes in Malaysia and Singapore.



19. Pandan

► **19 Pandan** (*Pandanus amaryllifolius*)

Take a deep breath and you will smell the earthy fragrance of Pandan in the air. This member of the *Pandanus* genus adds a distinctive flavour and aroma to many dishes throughout tropical Asia.

Locally, Pandan leaves are tied into a knot and cooked together with rice to add flavour to it. They are also added to tea and desserts, and used as a wrap in the popular Thai dish, pandan chicken.

The green extract from Pandan leaves is often used as food dye for local desserts and cakes such as pandan chiffon cake.

► **20 Betel, Sireh** (*Piper betle*)

This evergreen climbing vine is native to the Indo-Malayan region. It has oval, almost heart-shaped leaves which are slightly aromatic and have a bitter, pungent taste.

Betel leaves, also known as *Daun Sireh* in Malay, have been used in religious rituals such as weddings. They are chewed with a pinch of slaked lime, sliced betel nuts [from the seeds of the tall Betel-nut Palm (*Areca catechu*) in front of you] and spice additives (such as clove, saffron, nutmeg and mace), thus forming an addictive stimulant.

Betel leaves are applied as poultices to relieve stomach pains, ulcers, wounds and burns. They can also be heated and placed on the chest to relieve cough and asthma.



20. Betel

► **21 Belinjau, Meninjau** (*Gnetum gnemon*)

A tropical evergreen, this columnar tree has characteristic grey trunk with rings created by the scars of old leaf joints. Its fruits are oval-shaped and turn red when ripe.

The mature seeds are pounded flat and fried to make *emping belinjau* or belinjau crackers. Young shoots and inflorescences are blanched and eaten in *ulam*, a traditional Malay salad. The young leaves are also added to mixed vegetable soups.

In Indonesia, the leaves and seeds are prescribed for anaemia and fluid retention. The roots are used as an antidote for poison and treatment for malaria.

► **22 Roselle** (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*)

Roselle is a species of hibiscus with red, acidic and fleshy calyces (the outermost parts surrounding the flower bud). The calyx has a distinct sour flavour and is widely used to make beverages. Dried Roselle flowers are also used commercially to make food flavourings and colourings.

Roselle has been used to treat cough, fever, high blood pressure and liver disorders. It is generally considered to be anti-carcinogenic, owing to its high antioxidant content.

In Taiwan, the seeds are used as a diuretic and laxative.



21. Belinjau



22. Roselle

► **23 Galangal, Blue Ginger, Lengkuas** (*Alpinia galanga*)

Galangal belongs to the ginger family. The fresh rhizomes look a lot like ginger, but are somewhat larger and are not as orange in colour as fresh turmeric. Its young shoots are pale pink. These are more flavourful and tender than regular ginger.

Its aroma is similar to ginger and can be found in Southeast Asian cooking. The rhizome is too spicy to be eaten raw and is instead sliced, added in chunks or pounded into a paste for various curries and side dishes. Leaves and seeds are aromatic but not often used for flavouring.

As a herbal remedy, Galangal is effective against fungal skin diseases.



23. Galangal



24. Ginger

► **24 Ginger** (*Zingiber officinale*)

The goodness of Ginger has been known since antiquity. It is one of the oldest oriental spices to have reached southeastern Europe. The part of the plant that is most commonly used is the rhizome, a fleshy underground stem.

Such is the versatility of Ginger that despite its hot and pungent taste, it is used to complement a wide range of sweet and savoury Asian dishes. Gingers can be used fresh, preserved or powdered. In Western recipes, powdered Ginger is used to flavour bread, cookies, candy, ginger ale and ginger beer.

Its rhizome has numerous recorded medicinal uses; it combats conditions such as nausea, flatulence, inflammation and arthritis.



25. Sweet Basil



26. Thai Basil



27. Asam Gelugor

▶ **26 Thai Basil**

(Ocimum basilicum var. thrysiflora)

This plant has slender, reddish-purple stems and oval leaves with serrated edges. When freshly picked, the leaves give off an aroma more pungent than its actual taste. Hence, do not be put off by the smell; it can be safely consumed in large quantities.

Thai Basil is a staple in Thai curries and meat recipes. It is also used in Vietnamese and Indian dishes.

It is a herbal remedy as well for combating stress and repelling insects.

▶ **27 Asam Gelugor (*Garcinia atroviridis*)**

This tree grows to about 30m. It has a long trunk, smooth, grey bark and drooping branches and leaves. Its young leaves are reddish and sour; its fruits are green when young and turn bright yellow when mature.

The rind of the fruit is thinly sliced and dried to make *asam keping* ('sliced asam' in Malay). *Asam keping* has a sharp, sour taste and is commonly used in Asian curries and soups. The young shoots are used in cooking and in *ulam*.

Asam Gelugor is believed to be able to reduce cholesterol, facilitate weight loss, improve blood circulation and relieve high blood pressure.

▶ **25 Sweet Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*)**

There are many varieties of basil, but the succulent, large-leaved Sweet Basil is the most popular variety for culinary use.

Sweet Basil is a herbaceous (non-woody) shrub with many branches. Its tiny, white, long-stemmed flowers should be snipped off to prevent the plant from completing its life cycle. This encourages thicker foliage growth and hence more leaves for harvesting.

Sweet Basil leaves are commonly found in Italian cuisine. The leaves and flowers are also used in traditional medicine for the relief of coughs, colds and bronchitis.



28. Tamarind

▶ **28 Tamarind, Asam (*Tamarindus indica*)**

Tamarind is an evergreen tree native to tropical Africa that can grow up to about 25m tall. It serves not only as an ornamental tree, but also as an economic crop. Its long and brown pods contain edible, fleshy pulp that has an acidic yet pleasing flavour.

Tamarind is widely used in curries, vegetable stews and chutneys. It is also a feature in many steak sauces. The preparation of Tamarind paste for cooking is done by cracking the ripe pods and squeezing the pulp and seeds out into a receptacle.

Medically, Tamarind is a mild laxative and is rich in vitamins. It is reputed to strengthen the kidneys and liver.

▶ **29 Keramat**

Surrounded by greenery and shade is a *keramat*, or shrine, with a 14th-century Malay roof called *pendopo*. The 20 wooden pillars holding up the roof are carved with a fighting cock motif of Javanese origin. Here purportedly lies the remains of Sri Sultan Iskandar Shah, the fifth and last ruler of pre-colonial Singapore.



29. Keramat



30. Nine-pound Cannon

Walk on and see if you can spot the Petai (*Parkia speciosa*) tree. Petai is a tall tree of up to 45m in height. The flowers give way to long pods (40 to 50cm) that hang from the tree in small bunches. The fruit is edible and has a distinct taste. The beans, or petai, are used in a local dish, *sambal petai*. Apart from being a tasty dish, the beans are known to help in treating depression, pre-menstrual syndrome, blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and constipation.

▶ **30 Nine-pound Cannon**

Walk up the stairs and you will find a nine-pound cannon to your right. This cannon dates back to the 19th century and had become obsolete even before the fortification at Fort Canning was constructed. It was most probably used at Scandal Point, an earlier fortification at the east end of Padang.

We hope you have enjoyed your walk on this trail. If you wish to get up close and personal with more plants, embark on the Trees of the Fort Trail at Fort Canning Park.

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