

# Medicinal Plants in Afro-Brazil



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# Project Background and Name of Plants

## Project Background

Black Studies Across the Americas:  
Combining Black Studies with STEM in  
Afro-Brazil

Topic: Medicinal Plants

### Name of plants

Ruta graveolens

Capsicum Frutescens

Plectranthus Amboinicus

Hymenaea Courbaril

Hyptis Crenata



# Objective and Research Questions

## **Objective:**

To identify and research medicinal plants and their cultural significance in various Afro-descendant communities in Brazil.

## **Questions**

1. What medicinal plants are used among different Afro-descendant communities in Brazil?
2. What medicinal properties do these plants have and how are they used?
3. How are medicinal plants connected to Afro-Brazilian culture, religion, and spirituality?



# Methods and Approach

- Locate topic-relevant sources by utilizing keyword searches (ethnobotany, medical plants, ethnopharmacology, Afro-descendant, Afro-Brazil, Brazilian traditional medicine) in online databases---Google Scholar, Onesearch, and Academic Search Complete
  - Evaluated research articles to locate information regarding the plant and its medicinal properties
- Online blogs were used to provide further information on everyday uses of plant
  - Blogs further described techniques and preparations of the plant for various uses included medicinal purposes
- Work with collaborators from Brazil, Tatiana Damasceno and Alex Alberto Santos
- Visiting the Reyes Botanica in Washington Heights, Manhattan



# Results and Key Findings

Which medicinal plants uses are shared among different Afro-descendant communities in Brazil?

How are medicinal plants connected to Afro-Brazilian culture, religion and spirituality?

Using information from ethnobotanical studies of various Afro-descendent communities around Brazil, we created a table containing a list of medicinal plants and indicated whether or not each plant is reported to be used in each of the communities.

From this table, we selected plants that occurred in multiple communities to further research the medicinal properties and cultural significance of.

- Ruta graveolens
- Capsicum Frutescens
- Plectranthus Amboinicus
- Hymenaea Courbaril
- Hyptis Crenata

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	1	2	3	4	5	6
Boticudo ou Mané-velho	Acanthospermum hispidum	x				x	
Leopoldina	Alpinia zerumbet	x		x			
Benzetacil	Alternanthera brasiliana	x			x		
Cajueiro	Anacardium occidentale	x			x	x	
Abacaxi	Ananas comosus	x			x		
Graviola	Annona muricata	x		x		x	
Margosa	Artemisia absinthium		x	x	x		
Beterraba	Beta vulgaris	x			x		
Picão	Bidens pilosa	x		x			
Caiçara	Borreria verticillata			x		x	
Folha-da-fortuna, folha-da-costa	Bryophyllum pinnatum	x			x		



*Capsicum Frutescens*



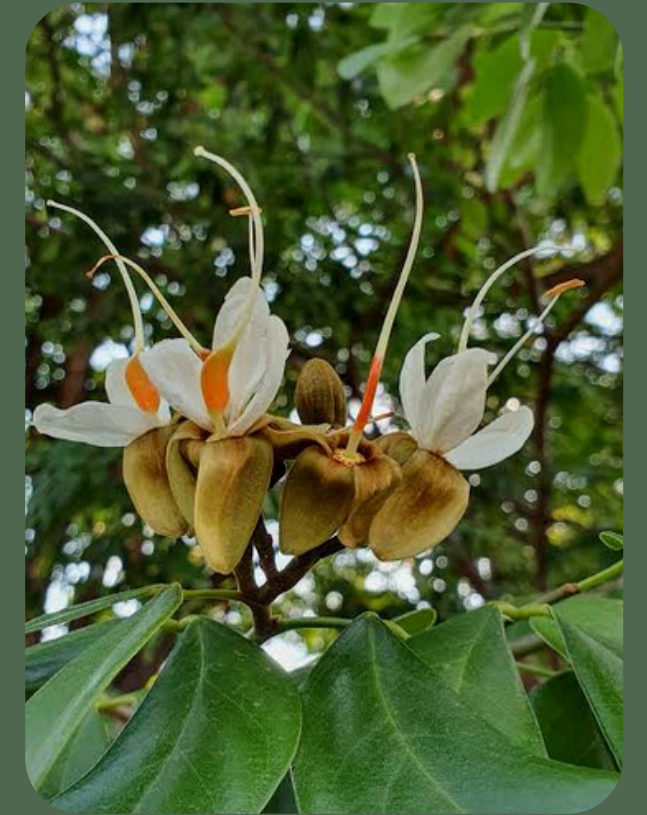
*Plectranthus Amboinicus*



*Hyptis Crenata*



*Ruta graveolens*



*Hymenaea Courbaril*

# Other Findings:

- A level of commonality within the medicinal plant usage of Afro-descendants in Brazil.

Many plants such as cajueiro (*Anacardium occidentale*), margosa (*Artemisia absinthium*), and mastruz (*Chenopodium ambrosioides*) are used by 3 or more of the studied Brazilian Afro-descendant communities.

- Plants are significant to many black Brazilians for both spiritual and medicinal purposes.

For many black Brazilians practicing or influenced by African-derived religions like Candomblé, the distinction between “medical” and “spiritual” ailments can be unclear.

Significant overlap between plants used for medicine and religion.

- A single medicinal plant can have numerous applications.

Ex: Rue has numerous medical properties ranging from an abortive to anti-inflammation, and equally as many spiritual uses such as warding away the evil eye, and for good fortune.



# Conclusion

Our research revealed that the study of medicinal plants lies at the intersection of many different but related fields:

Chemistry, biology, ecology, and botany.

Ethnobotany, anthropology, Black studies, and theology.

The overlap of these fields must be considered together in order to truly understand the whole picture of medicinal plants in Afro-Brazil.

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# Reflections

Working on this project was both challenging and rewarding. It taught us to effectively use available resources, work as a team, and follow strict deadlines.

Through this process, we did not only deepened our understanding of medicinal plants in Afro-Brazil but also became more aware of how natural resources are globally underused. This experience highlighted the significance of interdisciplinary research and reinforced the importance of preserving and fully exploring the potential of natural resources for the benefit of all.

THANK YOU

