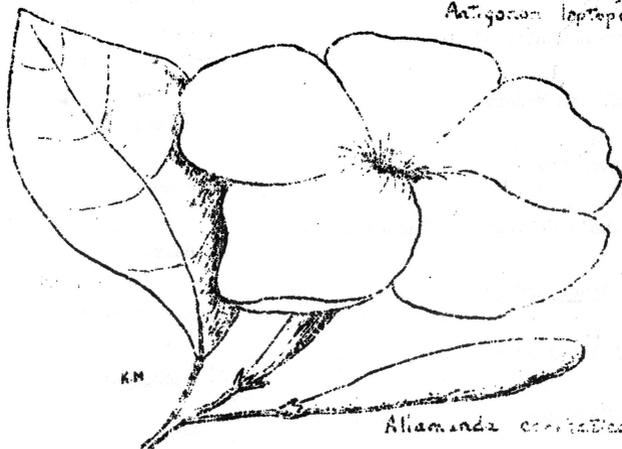




*Pedicularis thymalioides.*



*Antigonon leptopus.*



KN

*Allamanda cathartica.*

BOTANICAL AND HORTICULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS OF FIJI

K. Wood Mays

A recent trip to Fiji was most stimulating with a glimpse of a whole new world of plant life. Highlights were the graceful coconut palm, the breadfruit trees with their great shiny leaves and large fruit, papaws, rubber trees, cocoa trees with large pods hanging from their trunks, pandanus trees bearing golden fruit and leaves useful for making into mats, kapok or silk cotton trees and banana trees of many varieties. Fascinating too were the great banyan trees with large spread of foliage supported by numerous trunks formed by aerial roots. Poincianas or flame trees were gay with scarlet blossoms, orchid trees (*Bauhinia*) with white or purple flowers and oleanders added much colour to the scene.

Unmistakable was the kava plant, so like and related to our kawkawas but with coarser and shinier leaves. When chewed kawkawa is hot to the taste and I could detect a similar slight flavour after partaking of a ceremonial bowl of kava. Cassava, or tapioca as the locals call it, seems to be the staple food and the large roots tied in bundles were much in evidence as crops on their way to the local markets. They taste much like a sweet potato and have no resemblance to the tapioca we see in our shops. The common lawn grass, *Chrysopogon aciculatus* looks like a broad leafed paspalum. A common plant was the creeping *Mimosa pudica* or sensitive plant with fluffy balls of pinkish mauve flowers and leaves that closed when touched. Spectacular were large clumps of bright yellow candle flowers, and many colourful varieties of the pea family abounded including some which are crushed and used for poisoning fish.

Lacking time to study the wild flowers I concentrated on sketching some of the more spectacular garden plants many of which were probably introduced. The golden trumpets of the creeping shrub *Allemanda cathartica* were showy and the Turk's cap, *Malvaviscus arboreus* like a closed hibiscus were being visited by wattled honey-eaters. Scarlet pagoda flowers, *Clerodendron* were in several varieties and the long velvety red tails of chenille plants, *Acalypha hispida* showed up against the large heart shaped leaves. Another plant had spiny seed pods rather resembling those of our whau tree but were bright red in colour and the enclosed seeds provide a dye for colouring foodstuffs. This is called *Bixa orellana*. A waxy stemmed plant with fleshy leaves and red slipper-like flowers looked as if it were made of plastic. This is *Pedilanthus tithymaloides* (Euphorbiaceae) commonly called red slipper flower or red bird. Madagascar periwinkles *Catharanthus roseus* with pink or white flowers were in all the gardens, scents of ti blossoms or frangipani filled the air and a pretty pink flowered creeper, *Antigonon leptopus* or chain of love with heart shaped buds grew among purple Bougainvilleas. Orchids were quite at home and many with large pink flowers grew on roadside banks. Ponds filled with pink, white and blue waterlilies made room for the invasive water hyacinth, *Eichhornia crassipes* a beautiful but noxious weed. Ginger plants and bright leaved tropical shrubs gave an added brightness to the scene. Climbing up trees and some old buildings a *Philodendron* with huge variegated leaves was amazingly spectacular and king ferns were noted in various places. Apart from the main crops of sugar cane and pineapples Fiji is well endowed with many other natural foods and is a land of much scenic beauty.