

The Virgin Islands National Park has implemented a lot of rules meant to preserve and protect the numerous natural and historical resources that fall under its purview. Don't feed, touch, or otherwise harass the wildlife. Do not play amplified music or fly drones within the park. No glass bottles allowed at beaches.

# Foraging fun

By Andrea Milam

But there's one thing the VINP does permit that can make for a fun day of exploration—gathering fruits by hand for personal consumption. Make a treasure hunt out of finding these island edibles, or give each a try as you come upon them in your travels. Most importantly, take only small samples and remove what you intend to eat with care so others can enjoy foraging for many years to come.



## **Turk's cap cactus**

The Turk's cap cactus grows wild in the territory, mostly in dry, rocky areas. These short little barrel-shaped cacti litter the hillsides on the Ram Head hike. Nestled within the "Turk's cap" portion of the plant are tiny, brilliant pink fruits. You can eat them whole for a fun little pick-me-up as you hike to one of the most dramatic points on St. John. Turk's cap cactus fruits taste like a very mild kiwi. Take care not to prick yourself with the plant's spines when harvesting.



## **Sweet lime**

This evergreen shrub is invasive and considered a nuisance in the Virgin Islands, but its tiny deep red fruits are worth a taste. The fruit's skin is thick but edible. Inside is a single small seed encased in sweet, almost floral-tasting gooey fruit. Sweet lime shrubs are easy to find at Hawksnest beach, where they line the concrete walkways. Dispose of your seeds in the garbage so as not to further this invasive plant's hold on the Virgin Islands terrain.



**Sea purslane**

Walk to the rocky bookends of almost any Virgin Islands beach, and you'll find purslane. This flowering succulent thrives on briny shores, its environment lending to its salty taste. The plant's plump leaves often have a firm crunch, with a taste that's part green bean, part microgreen. Sea purslane's taste will vary depending on its environment; the population that fringes the shores of the salt pond behind Salt Pond beach are notably salty. Sea purslane is easy and fun to try when you're at the beach, or it makes an excellent accent to any homemade salad.



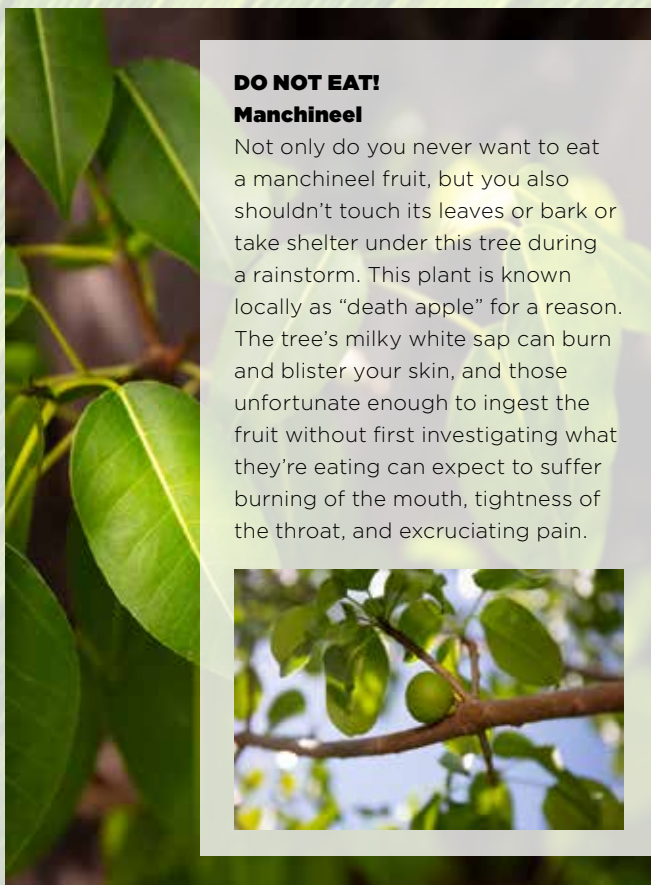
**False pineapple**

The bromelia pinguin is better known locally as false pineapple due to its resemblance to a pineapple plant. The pinguin's fruit also bears a similar taste to pineapple, but it's much different in appearance. Pinguin fruits are round and grow to about the size of ping-pong balls on a stalk that emerges from the center of the plant. They're ripe when the fruits are light yellow. Harvest these with extreme care, as the plant grows large and spiky around the fruit stalk. If you're sensitive to the bromelain in pineapple, you can expect that pinguin will cause a similar acidic burning feeling. Find false pineapple on the L'Esperance Trail.



**Seagrape**

Seagrape trees are part of the glue that holds island shorelines together with their root systems. They also bear a fruit that grows in bunches and is purple when ripe. There isn't much "fruit" to speak of, as the seagrape seed is large, so you'll roll the marble-sized deep purple orb around in your mouth and work the flesh off with your teeth. The flavor is similar to a grape, though much milder, and it does have an astringent-type quality that can leave your mouth dry. This fruit's slightly sour taste makes it a great ingredient for jams and jellies.



**DO NOT EAT!**  
**Manchineel**

Not only do you never want to eat a manchineel fruit, but you also shouldn't touch its leaves or bark or take shelter under this tree during a rainstorm. This plant is known locally as "death apple" for a reason. The tree's milky white sap can burn and blister your skin, and those unfortunate enough to ingest the fruit without first investigating what they're eating can expect to suffer burning of the mouth, tightness of the throat, and excruciating pain.



**Editor's note: Do not consume anything in the wild unless you have identified the plant or fruit with 100% certainty. You wouldn't want an upset stomach, or worse, to interrupt your Virgin Islands vacation.**