

Welcome to Cinchona Gardens

Cinchona Gardens, high in the Blue Mountains, close to Top Mountain and Clydesdale, was established in 1868 to facilitate commercial production of the cinchona tree which gave the property its name.

Cinchona bark was used to make quinine, a drug with antimalarial, painkilling and fever reducing properties.

High demand for quinine inspired the colonial government to consider planting cinchona in Jamaica. In 1861, on the recommendation of W.J. Hooker of Kew Gardens in London, the British provided seeds, which were initially planted at Bath Botanic Gardens in St Thomas. However, the climate proved unsuitable and another attempt was made at Cold Spring coffee plantation in the cools hills of St Andrew. The Cinchona plantation, which is around 1,500 metres or 5,000 feet high, was subsequently opened, with several thousand cinchona trees. The plants flourished but the industry died when India introduced cheaper quinine alternatives to the market.

The present-day Cinchona property includes the Great House and remains of once immaculately tailored gardens with orderly terraces. The remaining cinchona trees are easily distinguished by their pink flowers, but more so by the fact that their leaves turn red before they fall. Other plants that distinguish the site are the striking giant eucalyptus trees, the Norfolk Island Pines, Podocarpus, Agapanthus lilies, Hydrangeas, azaleas and Rhododendrons. These plants thrive in the garden where cool climatic conditions are similar to their European origins.

To many who knew it in its glory days, Cinchona now seems an abandoned property, though one that still has great potential. Even now, visitors have a picturesque view of St John's and St Catherine's Peaks and the main ridge of the Blue Mountains sweeping down to Strawberry Hill and Kingston Harbour. - Institute of Jamaica