Duppy Plants

Duppies are very much a part of Jamaican folklore. Some people seriously believe in and are terrified by the notion of duppies while others are septical but tell duppy stories to entertain. But what do you know bout duppy plants.

Night scented plants such as the jasmine are thought to attract duppies, and so are avoided. Scented lilies are regarded as death or duppy flowers for the same reasons and some people would never bring them inside a house; that same belief attaches to sea shells: they believed to attract duppies to the house and empower them. During the day, duppies take the form of large green lizards’ it is very bad luck to have such lizards nearby, and many Jamaicans kill them on sight. Duppy has given its name to a host of objects whose characteristic is that they are an imitation or shadow of the real thing. Thus Duppy Soursop or Duppy Peas closely resemble the soursop or peas but are not edible; a ‘duppy game’ is a drawn game. In other cases the object has uncanny characteristics, e.g. ‘Duppy fee fee’ for the Monkey Fiddle plant that makes a squeaking sound when its stems are rubbed together; Duppy Gun is a plant that has blueish purple flower and whose tiny cigar-shaped seed pods, when dampened, burst with a sudden explosion. Try wetting you hands and put one of the ripe seed pods (the brown one) in your hands and close your hands. The pod will pop open. Also called Daniel’s Great Gun. Duppy Riding-horse is the praying mantis; Duppy Umbrella is the wild mushroom or fungus. Duppy Fly Trap is a climbing vine that bears the largest flower to be found in Jamaica. The flower is a spotted yellow-brown and purple colour, and has a habit of trapping carrion flies. Many persons believe that the Duppy Fly Trap feeds on insects but this is not true. At times the flower exudes an unpleasant odor which attracts carrion flies (so it is sometimes called Poison Hog Meat). The flower just traps insects inside for a while until they are totally covered by pollen and then it lets them go. The plant is found usually along rivers, gullies and water courses from 360m to 800m and is used in folk medicine. It is a relative of Dutch-man’s Pipe which is sometimes cultivated in gardens. Some birds are known as ‘Duppy birds’ especially the Gimme-me-bit (also known as Night Hawk) cry is thought to be a demand for payment for getting rid of mosquitoes during the night and Ground-dove, and are regarded with suspicion.