

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 8, 2014

Press Contact: Nina Sazevich, (415) 752-2483; nina@sazevichpr.com

Stranded! Tropical Island Survival
A new exhibit at the Conservatory of Flowers
that just might save your life

May 8 through October 18, 2015

SAN FRANCISCO -- When that three-hour boat tour goes horribly wrong on your island vacation in paradise, a plant might just save your life. Many a famous castaway has survived an unexpectedly long stay on a deserted island by lashing palm fronds together to build shelter, harvesting the clean water found inside bamboo, fashioning a snare from a vine and more.

In a new exhibit entitled *Stranded! Tropical Island Survival* at the Conservatory of Flowers in Golden Gate Park, visitors “wash up” on an uncharted tropical shore to learn the ins and outs of island survival. Strolling through a living jungle of life-saving plants, they discover the best sources of building materials, food and water and see examples of structures and tools—all created with a touch of castaway kitsch. Fun survival facts fill the gallery, including tips for climbing coconut trees and more.

“I grew up with *Gilligan’s Island*, so my impression of being stranded was always a bit skewed by the idea that you could use a couple of coconuts and some bamboo to build things like battery chargers and sewing machines,” says Lau Hodges, Conservatory Curator. “But, in fact, plants have been sustaining tropical cultures for thousands of years and are a really critical element of survival in the tropics. Palms in particular. They are so important that 18th century botanist Linnaeus, the father of modern taxonomy, believed humans should be referred to as palmivorous because of our long dependence on them for all of our basic necessities.”

The exhibit makes clear that the first order of business is finding drinkable water. After a few hours in the tropics without water, your capacities will be severely limited, and within just a few days, death is a guarantee. Coconuts, bamboo and banana plants all store water that can be harvested. A relative of the banana, the traveler’s palm, is said to be able to hold up to a half gallon of water. A hole in the ground covered strategically with a banana leaf can serve as a solar water still to catch condensation. And rainwater can be funneled into containers with fan-shaped palm fronds. No container? No problem. Use a bromeliad, a plant with a spiraling arrangement of tightly overlapping leaves that acts as a water reservoir. Some of the biggest can hold up to twelve gallons of water.

The next priority is shelter. Bamboo and palm fronds are ideal for constructing a quick lean-to that will protect against weather and critters. Insulate with layers of palm fronds and coconut husks on the ground. Remember ... don't build under coconut palms if you want to avoid being conked in your sleep.

Luckily, the tropics are a cornucopia of food, but many fruits are poisonous, so it is always best to stick with what you know. Palms are a tremendous source of sustenance from coconuts to palm hearts. The so-called cabbage, the apical bud at the upper most part of the trunk, is considered by many cultures to be a delicacy. Plants can also be useful for hunting. Palm fronds can be woven together for basket fishing. The long leaves of many raffia palms can be processed as fishing line, and the sharp spikes of the Canary Island date palm make great hooks. Bait that with a bug, and you are ready to go. The vines of the rattan palm can be used to fashion a simple snare to catch birds or small animals.

Plants fill many other needs as well. Dried plant material and a carved out piece of hard wood will help you get a fire started. The 'give and take' palm is an important medicinal plant. The sap and bark can relieve pain, prevent infection and stop bleeding. For the very long stay, a number of palms can be used to make palm wine either by fermenting the fruits of date palms or the sap from their flower buds. The spikes of the Canary Island date palm can be used for sewing needles, and the waxy material on the upper leaves of many wax palms can be collected for making candles. Of course, you can also get to work on building that raft.

The exhibit also tells the stories of several famous castaways including the real life Robinson Caruso, Alexander Selkirk, who, in 1704, was marooned off the coast of Chile and spent 52 months there before being rescued.

Media sponsors for *Stranded! Tropical Island Survival* include KTVU FOX2 and SF Weekly.

***Stranded! Tropical Island Survival* is open Tuesdays – Sundays from 10 am to 4 pm and is included with admission to the Conservatory. Admission for San Francisco residents (with proof of residency) is \$5 general; \$3 youth 12-17, seniors and students with ID; \$1.50 children 5-11; children 4 and under FREE. Admission for non-residents is \$8 general, \$5 youth 12-17, seniors and students with ID; \$2 children 5-11; children 4 and under FREE. The public should call (415) 831-2090 or visit www.conservatoryofflowers.org for more information.**

Related Programming

Gala Under Glass: Opening Night Gala and Fundraiser

Thursday, May 7, 2015

6:30 to 11 pm

\$175 per person General admission

\$100 per person Young Steward ticket (for ages 21-35 only)

\$250 per person VIP reception (includes early entrance to the Gala at 5:30 p.m.)

It's a magical evening "under glass" as the Conservatory presents its annual gala supporting the important, ongoing preservation of this historic Victorian greenhouse in Golden Gate Park.

The evening is a rare chance to experience the enchantment of this lovely San Francisco landmark at night and includes dancing to the live sounds of the Dick Bright Orchestra and other special entertainment. Guests will also be the first to see the new exhibition *Stranded! Tropical Island Survival*. Strolling through a living jungle of majestic palms and lush green vines, guests see fascinating examples of how tropical plants can be used for survival.

No one, however, will need to be able to fashion a snare from a vine in order to eat and drink well at this festive event. Guests will sip botanical cocktails and feast on exquisite morsels, and are invited to place bids on unique vacation packages, art, wine, jewelry and more. Elegant cocktail attire encouraged.

This year's Gala Committee is chaired by Martha Woollomes, with Honorary Chair Diane B. Wilsey. Media sponsor is *San Francisco Cottages and Gardens*. All proceeds benefit the Conservatory of Flowers' youth education program, historic greenhouse preservation, plant maintenance and rare plant acquisitions.

Background

The Conservatory of Flowers is a spectacular living museum of rare and beautiful tropical plants under glass. From Borneo to Bolivia, the 1,750 species of plants at the Conservatory represent unusual flora from more than 50 countries around the world. Immersive displays in five galleries include the lowland tropics, highland tropics, aquatic plants, potted plants and special exhibits. Opened in 1879, the wood and glass greenhouse is the oldest existing conservatory in North America and has attracted millions of visitors to Golden Gate Park since it first opened its doors. It is designated as a city, state and national historic landmark and was one of the 100 most endangered sites of the World Monuments Fund.

###