

Joewood: Sanibel's official plant

By *Berdenna Thompson*
Special to the *Islander*

If you want to experience one of Sanibel's rarest treasures look for a joewood in bloom during July and August. Admire and enjoy the fragrance of these lovely white flowers. On June 20, 1989, by city proclamation, the joewood (*Jacquina keyensis*) was declared Sanibel's official plant. Joewood's scientific name honors Nicholas Joseph von Jacquin (1777 - 1817), a distinguished Austrian professor who collected, cataloged, drew and painted many West Indian plants.

"Keyensis" recognizes the Florida Keys where the plant is often found. The common name of joewood is a contraction of cudejoewood found on Cudjoe Key. The story goes: an African slave,



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thin, blue gray and usually marked by pale or nearly white blotches. The leathery leaves are about one to three inches long. Each leaf has an obscure midrib and covered on the lower surfaces with pale dots.

The fragrant bouquet of the joewood flower is possibly more aromatic than that of any other of our native plants. The flowers are ivory-white and star-shaped, arising at the ends of branches in clusters. Each is stalked and has a short lobed green leaf-like calyx. The white petals spread wide when the flowers open. There is a pronounced difference between



the male and female flowers both of which appear on the same plant. Since the flowers are attractive and sweet-scented, insects are obvious pollinators. Flowers appear from November through June, but are more abundant in July and August.

The fruit ripens in autumn. Its tiny berries are about 1/3 of an inch in diameter, orange-red and hard coated when fully ripe. The leathery coat encloses the enlarged and fleshy placenta. In this issue are several flat, round seeds.

Joewood grows in dry soil or silica sand in the immediate neighborhood of the shore or coast. Occasionally, it may be associated with mangroves growing on exposed soil. It has also been found on dry hammocks and pinelands of the Everglade Keys. While not abundant,



Joewood is a slow grower and does not transplant easily. On Sanibel, some fine specimens were carelessly destroyed along the dry ridge Gulf front. Many of our natural coastal areas have been altered and developed. Joewood was abundant in the Wulfert area. At the time of the Sanctuary development, a 14 ton tree spade was used to relocate many fragile plants. It employed four shovels simultaneously digging about four feet into the ground and about two feet from the plant in order to attempt to keep the earth intact around the root system. Not many of the transplanted joewoods survived. This was particularly unfortunate since joewood is on the threatened plant list.

On Silver Key, there is a display of joewoods with one measuring 15 feet. At one time this area was under intense pressure for the development, but was later purchased by the city.

Joewood is found in some 50 Florida sites. It ranges north to Symrna Beach on the east coast and to Gasparilla Island on the west coast. It is more common in Cuba, Jamaica and the Bahama Islands.

Directions for Silver Key: Walk from Bowman's Beach Parking Lot. After crossing the bridge turn right on path. Walk to the end of the path, approximately one mile. A beautiful walk.

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named Cudjoe, escaped from the West Indies to the Florida Keys. Cudjoe Key supposedly was named after this African slave.

Classified as shrub or small tree, joewood has an attractive sculptured appearance. It is an evergreen with many branches forming a compact round top. Most are considered a shrub but heights can be 15 feet or more. It has a straight trunk and rigid spreading branches. The wood shows no growth rings. It's bark is