

## GROWING TOGETHER: A YEAR OF PLANTING, LEARNING & COMMUNITY

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(JAN 2026):**

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# A Warm Note from VIHS

Dear Members, Friends, and Garden Family:

As we look back on 2025, we do so with full hearts and deep gratitude. It has been a year of planting, nurturing, sharing, and growing together. Our gardens flourished, yes – but even more beautiful was the way our community flourished. Hands reached out to help, knowledge was shared freely, friendships deepened, and together we strengthened the roots that hold us as a people.

Like every good Caribbean garden, this year had sunshine and showers. There were moments that challenged us, stretched us, and reminded us of our vulnerability. Yet through it all, we showed resilience. We dug deeper, we adapted, and we continued to sow hope. That quiet strength – that spirit of “we will make it grow” – is something truly special. It reminds us that horticulture is not just about plants; it is about life, faith, heritage, and caring for one another.

To our volunteers, you are the heartbeat of this society. To our supporters and sponsors, thank you for believing in the power of green spaces, local food, education, and community wellness. To every member who planted a seed, shared a cutting, mentored a young gardener, or simply showed up – we celebrate you. You helped make 2025 a year of purpose, beauty, and impact.

As we step into 2026, we do so with hope and excitement. There is more to grow, more people to reach, more young hands to guide, and more spaces to transform. Together, we will continue to nurture not only plants, but pride, resilience, and connection across our islands.

Thank you for journeying with us. The garden ahead is bright – and we’re so glad you’re part of it.

Warmest regards,  
Portia Harrigan  
President, VI Horticultural Society

**VIHS Exec L-R:**  
**Portia Harrigan (President);**  
**Rochelle Smith (Secretary);**  
**Pamela Penn (Treasurer);**  
**Tessa Smith (Assistant Secretary);**  
**Vareen Vanterpool (Vice President)**

Also pictured:  
Erle Noronha (Workshop Facilitator)



# A YEAR IN BLOOM: 2025 HIGHLIGHTS



# A YEAR IN BLOOM: 2025 HIGHLIGHTS



COMMUNITY SPIRIT IN FULL BLOOM.

# ROOTS THAT HOLD US: GROWING TOGETHER IN 2025

In 2025, the Virgin Islands faced challenges that tested our strength—storms that bent trees and battered coastlines, economic uncertainties, and the lingering effects of global shifts. Yet, amid these trials, something remarkable blossomed: our gardens became sanctuaries of hope and hubs of connection.

Across neighborhoods, raised beds and backyard plots turned into meeting grounds. Seeds were shared like stories, and advice passed from hand to hand—how to coax life from rocky soil, how to protect tender shoots from salt-laden winds. These exchanges were more than practical; they were acts of solidarity. Gardening reminded us that resilience is rooted in community.

Plants themselves carried our heritage. Each cassava cutting whispered of ancestral survival, each hibiscus bloom echoed cultural pride. From traditional herbs to fruit trees that fed generations, our gardens became living archives—connecting past and present, culture and ecology. They told stories of migration, adaptation, and creativity, revealing that the Virgin Islands' history is not only written in books but also in the soil beneath our feet.

When storms came, we weathered them together. Neighbors helped replant toppled banana trees, rebuilt trellises, and shared harvests when supplies ran low. These acts of unity turned adversity into opportunity, proving that the bonds we cultivate are as vital as the crops we grow. As we look ahead, let us continue to nurture these green spaces—not just for beauty or sustenance, but as symbols of who we are: a people rooted in heritage, resilient in spirit, and united in purpose. In every seed lies a promise, and in every garden, a story waiting to bloom.



## Storm-Resilient Gardening Tips

- **Choose Wind-Tolerant Plants:** Opt for sturdy species like cassava, pigeon peas, and coconut palms.
- **Plant in Clusters:** Group plants to shield each other from strong winds.
- **Use Raised Beds & Mulch:** Helps with drainage and prevents root rot during heavy rains.
- **Secure Structures:** Reinforce trellises and stakes before hurricane season.
- **Harvest Early:** Pick ripe fruits and vegetables ahead of approaching storms.
- **Keep Backup Seeds:** Store seeds in waterproof containers for quick replanting after storms.

# Bring the garden to life—colour it your way!

Color the rhythm of the islands! Bring this tropical scene to life with vibrant blooms, lush greenery, and a splash of Caribbean sunshine. Share your masterpiece (send to [vihs@vihorticulture.org](mailto:vihs@vihorticulture.org)) and it may be featured in the next newsletter!



# Growing for Good: Our Impact in 2025

Celebrating a year of growth, community, and sustainability

2025 was a landmark year for our horticultural society—a year where we deepened our roots in community engagement and blossomed with initiatives that brought people together around plants, food, and sustainable living.

## Symphony of Blooms – Our First Ever Horticultural Fair

On May 4th, 2025, we hosted our inaugural horticultural fair, Symphony of Blooms. This vibrant event was a true celebration of nature and creativity, featuring food and fun for the whole family, hands-on workshops, a lively plant competition and sales, and live entertainment that kept spirits high throughout the day. It was more than a fair—it was a gathering of hearts and hands united by a love for horticulture.

## Sustainable Farming Practices Course

From May 5-8, we offered an intensive course on Sustainable Farming Practices, equipping participants with knowledge and skills in permaculture, soil management, plant systems, and sustainable living and design. This program was a cornerstone of our mission to promote environmentally responsible agriculture and empower our community to grow with purpose.

## World Food Day – Breadfruit Takes Center Stage

Our booth at the Department of Agriculture's World Food Day event was a crowd favorite, showcasing the versatility of breadfruit with an array of delicious products: crispy chips, refreshing punch, delicious shortbread, savory tacos, and decadent cake. This initiative highlighted our commitment to local crops and food security, while delighting taste buds with creative Caribbean flavors.

## Night Market – Ushering in the Holiday Season in the City

As the year drew to a close, we brought festive cheer to the city with a Night Market that combined horticulture, artisanal goods, and holiday spirit. This event created a warm, welcoming space for families and friends to shop, share, and celebrate together.

## Garden Angels – Giving Back to Schools

One of our most meaningful contributions was serving as Garden Angels at a local public primary school. By helping to establish and maintain a school garden, we provided children with hands-on learning experiences about plants, nutrition, and sustainability—planting seeds of knowledge that will grow for years to come.

## Looking Ahead

As we reflect on these milestones, we are proud of the impact we've made and excited for what's next. Together, we are not just growing plants—we are growing communities, resilience, and a greener future.

## VIHS 2025 By The Numbers

Trees planted: **20**

Volunteers engaged: **10**

Schools reached: **5**

Spaces beautified: **3**

Vendors supported: **30**

Workshops hosted: **5**

Events held: **2**

Members added: **20**



*"Rooted in purpose,  
blooming with  
possibilities."*

# Voices from the Garden

Member Reflections

## A Female Gardener's Voice ...

"2025 was a year of growth—literally and figuratively. As a woman in the VI Horticultural Society, I've found strength in collaboration and joy in seeing our gardens flourish. My favorite activity was the permaculture workshop where I learned more about building with the land. The instructor was excellent and the camaraderie was lovely. I also enjoyed mentoring new members; sharing tips on composting and soil health reminded me how much knowledge we hold collectively. Gardening is empowerment—it connects us to the earth and to each other. I'm proud of what we've achieved and eager for what's next."

## A Gardening Elder's Voice...

"This year reminded me why I fell in love with gardening decades ago. Working with the society has been more than tending plants—it's about nurturing community. I've seen younger members bring fresh ideas, and it gives me hope that our traditions will endure. My proudest moment was sharing old grafting techniques during our workshop; seeing those methods still spark curiosity was deeply rewarding. Gardening teaches patience, and in 2025, I've learned that patience applies to people too. We grow together, just like the gardens we care for."

## A Youth Gardener's Voice...

"Joining the Horticultural Society this year was a game-changer for me. I used to think gardening was just for older folks, but now I see it's about sustainability and creativity. I loved volunteering at the horticultural fair—it felt amazing to know our work provided fun experience for families. I also learned so much about native plants and how they protect our environment. My biggest takeaway? Gardening isn't just a hobby; it's a way to make a real difference. I'm excited to keep learning and bring more young people into this movement."



## A Little Gardener Says....

"This year in the Horticultural Society was so much fun! I planted my first tomato plant and watched it grow big enough to make sandwiches for my family. I liked learning about worms and how they help the soil—it was like having tiny helpers underground. My favorite part was the flower bed we made for the school garden because the butterflies came every day. Gardening makes me feel proud because I can take care of something and see it grow. Next year, I want to try growing watermelons!"

# LOOKING AHEAD...



*"The garden ahead is bright--and together we will keep it growing. Thank you for being part of this beautiful journey."*

## About the VI Horticultural Society

The Virgin Islands Horticultural Society is dedicated to fostering a love for plants, gardens, and green spaces while strengthening our community through horticultural education and events.

Our goals are to:

- Encourage horticultural knowledge and sustainable practices
- Foster community engagement through events and projects
- Support small local businesses in the gardening industry
- Promote beautification of public and private spaces
- Advocate for environmental stewardship across the VI



## VIHS 2026 EVENTS

- **Feb**
  - Quarterly Membership Meeting
- **Mar**
  - Horticultural Fair
- **Jun**
  - Summer Market
- **Jul**
  - Youth Food Security Workshop
  - Quarterly Membership Meeting
- **Oct**
  - Quarterly Membership Meeting
- **Nov**
  - Holiday Night Market
- **ONGOING**
  - Work at Ebenezer Thomas Primary School's Garden

# Plant of the Year: Breadfruit!

- Nutritious, Sustainable, Endlessly Versatile

## Health & Sustainability

Breadfruit is having a renaissance in home kitchens and professional restaurants alike. Naturally gluten-free and rich in complex carbohydrates, it provides sustained energy without the spikes associated with refined starches. Its dietary fiber supports digestive health and helps you feel satisfied longer. Breadfruit also offers potassium for heart health, plus small but meaningful amounts of vitamins and minerals.

Beyond the plate, breadfruit is a powerhouse for sustainable living. The trees are drought-tolerant once established, provide shade, and help prevent soil erosion. A single mature tree can produce abundant fruit for decades, supporting household food security and reducing reliance on imported staples. For gardeners and growers, breadfruit contributes to biodiverse, climate-resilient landscapes—an excellent fit for tropical agroforestry.



## Fun with Malik, Motivated Mini Chef: Easy Breadfruit Chips!

### Instructions:



- 1. Prepare the Breadfruit:** Wash, peel, and remove the core.
- 2. Slice:** Cut into thin slices (like potato chips).
- 3. Season:** Toss slices with oil and a pinch of salt.
- 4. Bake:** Arrange on a tray and bake at 375°F (190°C) for 20-25 minutes, turning halfway, until golden and crisp.
- 5. Cool and Enjoy:** Perfect as a snack or lunchbox treat!

**Tip:** Kids can help with safe steps like tossing the slices in oil and seasoning.

### Ingredients:

- 1 small breadfruit (ripe but firm)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (or coconut oil)
- A pinch of salt
- Optional: a sprinkle of cinnamon or mild seasoning for flavor

### Did You Know?

Breadfruit is a tropical superfood! It's packed with fiber, vitamins, and minerals, and helps keep kids energized. Breadfruit trees also support the environment by preventing soil erosion and providing shade.

"From tree to table—healthy habits start with local goodness!"

# Plant of the Year: Breadfruit!

- Nutritious, Sustainable, Endlessly Versatile



## Sweet Breadfruit Pudding with Coconut & Spice

A tropical twist on a comforting classic.

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked breadfruit (boiled or steamed until soft)
- 1 cup coconut milk
- ½ cup brown sugar (or coconut sugar)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp grated nutmeg
- Pinch of salt
- 2 tbsp melted butter (or coconut oil)
- Optional: ¼ cup raisins or chopped dried fruit

## Tips for Growing Breadfruit

- Site & Soil: Full sun; well-drained soil enriched with organic matter. Trees need plenty of space to grow—well away from buildings and other structures, as roots grow large—and they appreciate consistent moisture. Avoid waterlogged sites.
- Planting: Young trees appreciate wind protection and regular watering during establishment (first 6–12 months).
- Care: Mulch generously to conserve moisture and build soil; prune lightly to manage height and shape.
- Harvest: Pick when the peel shows light freckling and yields slightly to pressure (for roasting/boiling). Very firm fruit suits chips; riper fruit leans creamy for soups and bakes.

### Did You Know???

Breadfruit's natural starch makes it perfect for creamy desserts. In Caribbean kitchens, it's often paired with coconut and warm spices for a rich, comforting treat that celebrates local flavors.

### Instructions:

1. **Mash Breadfruit:** In a bowl, mash the cooked breadfruit until smooth.
2. **Mix Wet Ingredients:** Stir in coconut milk, sugar, vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg, salt, and melted butter. **Fold in raisins if using.**
3. **Bake:** Pour mixture into a greased baking dish. Bake at 350°F (175°C) for 35–40 minutes, until set and lightly golden on top.
4. **Serve:** Cool slightly before serving. Enjoy warm or chilled, topped with a drizzle of coconut cream or a sprinkle of toasted coconut flakes.

**Tip:** For extra indulgence, serve with a scoop of tropical fruit sorbet or a splash of rum sauce.



### MORE BREADFRUIT FACTS:

- **A mature breadfruit tree can yield hundreds of fruits annually and can feed families for decades.**
- **Breadfruit can be roasted, boiled, fried, baked, mashed, or milled into flour—remarkably versatile across cuisines.**
- **The tree's broad canopy supports microclimates that benefit understory plants in agroforestry systems.**



# VIRGIN ISLANDS HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Cultivating Beauty, Growing Community.

## STORIES OF IMPACT

### Rooted in Resilience:

### The Breadfruit Tree and the Callwoods

On a hillside in Tortola, a towering breadfruit tree has nourished the Callwood family for generations. Elara, the matriarch, planted it decades ago. Today, her son Samuel, his partner Nia, Uncle Aidan, and young Maya tend the land together.

In May 2025, storms struck just days before the family's big plans: showcasing breadfruit dishes at the new Horticultural Society's first horticultural fair, Symphony of Blooms. Heavy rain carved gullies into their fields, and two limbs snapped from the beloved tree. Samuel wanted to cancel their participation in the fair to deal with the damage, but Nia argued they couldn't lose momentum or the chance to help fund a school garden project they'd been talking about for so long.

The family chose resilience. They worked through the night—reinforcing soil with mulch, pruning the tree, and preparing a booth themed “Breadfruit & Resilience: From Storm to Table.” At the fair, their breadfruit chips, tacos, and rum-kissed cake sold out, and Maya even won a ribbon for her sapling entry. Their story of adaptation inspired visitors and sparked conversations about sustainable farming.

By year's end, the Callwoods had restored their hillside, shared knowledge at the Department of Agriculture's World Food Day and the Society's Night Market, and served as Garden Angels at their community's primary school. The breadfruit tree stood strong again—a symbol of how deep roots and shared effort help families weather any storm.

The plot of this tale has been carefully nurtured in the soil of imagination;  
any resemblance to real gardeners is purely coincidental.

*Thank you for reading!*

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