

The Botanical Garden of the Virgin Islands After Hurricane Maria

It has been just about three weeks since Hurricane Maria roared through St. Croix and the St. George Village Botanical Garden. I want to give everyone an update.

Buildings,etc.

The entry booth was blown over and has been righted. The left entry gate was snapped and blown off. We are checking with welders to see what can be done. The Bodine Center pavilion had some of the large West Indian style doors blown off and damaged. For now, these will be stored. We'll see how best to repair/re-hang them. The Manager's House had some of the ridge roofing metal peeled back a bit. Amy's partner, Matt Brown, got up there and nailed it back. Massive amounts of plant debris filled the pavilion and courtyard. This has been cleared. The Moko Jumbies by the big Kapok tree were destroyed. The Great Hall has a hole in one tile, a branch has punched a hole in a tile at the office, and there's some considerable door damage. Some chairs were swept out of the hall through doors that remained closed. They were bent to pieces, and we still can't explain how they got outside! There may be more roof damage, but we can't be sure at this time. All the visual areas seem alright save for the two holes in the two roof tiles. Water got into the office, kitchen, and bathrooms under doors, and those areas are drying out. No major issues have been observed in those spots so far. The shade cover on the Orchid House was damaged along with some of the support trusses. The entire shade cover area over the Nursery was destroyed, and benches and plants were tossed over. Perimeter fences have been damaged or destroyed all along the property lines.

Plants

The damage to the collection and gardens was simply catastrophic. Many plants and trees were blown over, snapped and mangled. The resulting mess and clean up is daunting. But the area in front of and around the Bodine Visitor Center has been largely cleaned up, and roadways have been cleared, save for the main Palm Drive (see photos below). That will be done later to give some security to the place. We don't want to make it easy for someone to access the back half of the garden. Many

palms are down, and few can be salvaged, though many are still standing. The later should recover since my inspections show most of the center growing points seem alright. Among the most notable losses: the large Saman tree fell into the Wedding Garden, and about a half dozen Royal Palms fell along the palm drive, largely on the north side. Two of the three mature Canary Island Date palms by the Great Hall fell. It's amazing they missed the building! All the potted plants that were put inside buildings are fine as is the majority of our potted orchid collection that I put under benches for protection. A few volunteers have been putting nursery plants back in pots and uprighting them so they can survive.

Going Forward

We will continue the slow clean-up process with our staff. I am organizing two volunteer groups to come and help from stateside. The first will be tree guys from the Chicago area, and the second group is from Ohio. The former will be helping cut on the ground but also climbing to properly prune specimen tree damage so it can heal. The latter will be doing lots of pruning, nursery work, weeding and generally doing the detail work to bring us up to snuff. Amy is working with the emergency folks on island hopefully to get some grass cut up and removal work done. She happily got Dept. of Public Works to remove a lot of the Hurricane Irma debris, and they said they'd come again. I am consulting with directors at several botanical gardens in Texas and Florida to get their suggestions to help guide us since they are further in the process (Harvey & Irma). I am considering the idea of making some of the fallen material available for an art project. Artists and the general public could be creative, and their work would be on display throughout the grounds. It would give us some attractions to be seen while things re-grow and help folks emotionally heal. We could also combine forces with a non-profit or two to create furniture out of some of the lovely trees that have fallen, to be sold to benefit both.

Our plan is to reopen the garden to the public around **November first**. Events scheduled before this may have to be rescheduled/canceled. We'll try to send out updates as we have them. This is a safety issue, and at first, only the eastern part will be open, including the visitors center. We will be in recovery mode through at least mid-2018, opening areas when they are ready. All suggestions are welcome. All volunteer help is appreciated. Donations are now even more important than ever to help with the recovery. Checks can be sent to our [mailing address](#) and may be

designated for recovery efforts if desired. Communication will be best by email at this time since lack of power is hampering answering phone calls: infoatthegarden@gmail.com.

Final Thoughts

Our botanical garden has been a centerpiece of life on St. Croix and is becoming a central player in conservation throughout the region. It has also risen from the hurricane ashes before. With all of us pulling together The Botanical Garden of the Virgin Islands will be back again, fully engaged in our historic preservation, education, and conservation mission. Many thanks to our dedicated staff and volunteers for all their hard work so far. I'd especially like to thank all of you for your continued generous support during this challenging chapter in our ongoing story.

Dewey Hollister

Executive Director



St. George Village
Botanical Garden

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St. George



**Palm Drive looking East
Before Maria**



**Palm Drive looking East
After Maria**