

# Julia F. Morton

## 1912-1996

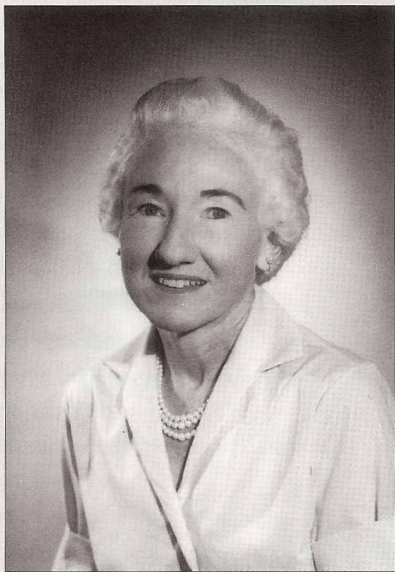


Photo courtesy of the University of Miami.

*"... a five-foot dynamo  
who would hike through jungles, across islands,  
and up mountains to locate ... a plant."*

Floridians interested in ethnobotany owe a great debt to the life's work of Julia Frances Morton, self-taught research scientist, illustrator, photographer, and Director of the Morton Collectanea at the University of Miami. Julia Morton died

in September, 1996 from injuries suffered in a traffic accident.

Morton's passion for botany began when she met her husband Kendal in 1933. Together, they collaborated on the *Collectanea* and other projects until his death in the mid-1960s. In a career that spanned over six decades, she authored or co-authored ten books, including the immense volume, *Atlas of Medicinal Plants of Middle America*, which took over 17 years to compile. Other works include — *Wild Plants for Survival in South Florida*, *Native Trees and Plants for Florida Landscaping*, *Major Medicinal Plants*, and *Plants Poisonous to People*.

Julia Morton had little formal academic background. Her university training consisted of a few community college courses in Spanish. Yet, in 1973, in recognition of her great contributions, Florida State University awarded her an honorary doctoral degree, and later named her an outstanding academic woman in Florida. The *Miami Herald* called her a "five-foot dynamo," who would hike through jungles, across islands, and up mountains to locate and photograph a plant.

Dr. Morton was recognized internationally for her expertise in the area of toxic species. In the 1960s, she was called upon by the United States government to research native plants in Vietnam and Thailand, and

participate in the creation of a jungle survival manual for U.S. troops. She also authored documents used in Poison Control Centers and hospital emergency rooms throughout the state.

Dr. Morton was one of the very first scientists to suggest a link between diet and cancer. Working with the National Institute of Health in the 1960s, she identified the cancer-causing potential of chemicals found in bush teas consumed among residents of Curacao, who had unusually high rates of esophageal malignancy.

Dr. Morton was an honorary member of the Florida Native Plant Society. She was a founding member of several other organizations, including the Society for Economic Botany, and the Rare Fruit Council International. She served as president of the Florida State Horticultural Society, on the Board of Trustees of Fairchild Tropical Garden, and was voted into the Florida Agriculture Hall of Fame.

The Julia Morton Memorial Endowment Fund has been established at the University of Miami. For further information, contact the College of Arts and Sciences, Office of the Dean, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida 33124.

We thank author Susan Boro Moyers for this tribute to Dr. Morton.