

Lā‘au Makamae o Hawai‘i

Precious Plants of Hawai‘i

Polynesians brought many precious items with them on their long journeys of two-way voyaging to Hawai‘i. These “canoe plants” ensured the survival of their people and played a vital role in every aspect of life.

Noni

Indian Mulberry

Morinda citrifolia

Polynesian Introduced



This medicinal plant was used to treat wounds, boils, bone fractures, and sore muscles. The roots and bark make red and yellow dye for *kapa* (barkcloth).

Polynesian Introduced: Brought to Hawai‘i by Polynesians on canoes.

Indigenous: Found in Hawai‘i and elsewhere on Earth.

Endemic: Evolved in Hawai‘i and found nowhere else on Earth

Kukui

Candlenut

Aleurites moluccana

Polynesian Introduced



Kukui kernels fueled Hawaiian torches and candles. The nuts are roasted and eaten as a relish called *‘inamona*. Medicinally, the raw nuts were eaten as a laxative. *Kukui* nut oil was used as a canoe varnish.

Mai‘a

Banana

Musa acuminata

Polynesian Introduced



This large herb produces edible fruits, cooked or given as *ho‘okupu* (offerings) at *heiau* (temples). Most bananas were *kapu* (forbidden) to women. Banana leaves serve as food wrappers and keep food clean, the juicy stalks are an important part of cooking food in the *imu* (earth oven). It is the plant form of the god Kanaloa.

Kou

Cordia subcordata

Polynesian Introduced



Kou wood was prized for food platters, bowls, and containers; it does not impart a bad taste onto food like the native *koa* wood. Canoes, paddles, and fishhooks were also made of *kou*.

‘Ulu

Breadfruit

Artocarpus altilis

Polynesian Introduced



The large edible fruits of ‘ulu are contain high amounts of vitamins B and C. Strong glue was rendered from the milky sap for canoe building. ‘Ulu and other woods were also used to make surfboards, canoes, and *ki‘i* (carved images).

Kō

Sugarcane

Saccharum officinarum

Polynesian Introduced



Sugarcane juice made herbal medicines taste better. Sugarcane leaves, like *hala* and *ti* leaves were used for thatching the inside of *hale* (houses).

Wauke

Paper Mulberry

Broussonetia papyrifera

Polynesian Introduced

Wauke was cultivated for its inner bark from which the finest quality *kapa* (barkcloth) was made. Making *kapa* is a lengthy process; the inner bark is removed, soaked, and then pounded on a wooden anvil with different types of wooden beaters.



Ipu

Bottle Gourd

Lagenaria siceraria

Polynesian Introduced



Ipu were primarily cultivated for use as water containers, and for storage. Percussion instruments and rattles made from *ipu* accompany hula and chants. *Ipu* were carved into ceremonial helmets used by priests of Kū.

Hala

Pandanus tectorius

Polynesian Introduced

Indigenous



Durable *hala* leaves were plaited into canoe sails, mats, and baskets. The leaves were also used for thatching. The many “keys” of the large fruit were eaten fresh as a famine food or dried to make small brushes for decorating *kapa* (barkcloth) with plant dyes.

Milo

Portia Tree

Thespesia populnea

Polynesian Introduced



Milo wood came second only to *kou* for wood carvings such as food platters, poi calabashes, and bowls. This was one of the many cordage plants.

Pili

Tanglehead Grass

Heteropogon contortus

Indigenous



Pili grass was primarily used for thatching *hale* (houses). It grows in large clumps that can be uprooted, trimmed, and bundled, then tied and layered upon the wooden framework. *Pili* grass is abundant in dry areas. Look it in the main parking lot.

Niu

Coconut

Cocos nucifera

Polynesian Introduced



Niu is truly the “tree of life” it provided Hawaiians with food, coconut water, baskets, thatching, and cordage. Coconut husk fibers made strong rope, seven miles of cordage was required to make a double hull canoe! *Niu* is the plant form of the god Kū and the goddess Hina.

Kī or Ti

Cordyline fruticosa

Polynesian Introduced



Ti leaves have a multitude of uses such as; cooking, storing food, fashioning ‘*ahu lā ī* (rain capes) and *hukilau* (fishing with a seine). *Ho ‘okupu* (offerings) were usually wrapped with ti. It is the plant form of the god Kāne.

Loulu

Hawaiian Fan Palm

Pritchardia spp.

Endemic

Loulu wood was used for spears, thatching, house posts, and drums. Considered sacred, its fibers were woven into burial caskets. The green fruit is edible. There are 19 species of *loulu*, some are endangered, rare, or vulnerable.



Kamani

Alexandrian Laurel

Calophyllum inophyllum

Polynesian Introduced



Kamani wood was ideal for bowls and platters known as *pā kamani*. Its aromatic flowers scented *kapa* cloth. Look for it in the main parking lot.