



Native Plants of Lē'ahi

Koki'o Ke'oke'o

Hawai'i's native plants and animals arrived by floating across the ocean, being blown here on the wind, or being carried by birds. Most of the plants are endemic, meaning they evolved here in the islands and are found nowhere else. Indigenous species are native to more than one place. These native plants disappeared from Lē'ahi after the early 1800s when land use changed and non-native species were introduced.

Visit the gardens in the park to see and learn more about these native plants that once grew in the hot, dry environment of Lē'ahi crater.



Alahe'e
Psychotria odoratum
Indigenous

Luna & Allie

Description: Alahe'e grows as a shrub or small tree. It has sleek dark round leaves with clusters of fragrant small white flowers. The bark is gray and either smooth or rough in texture.

Uses: Leaves are used to make black-brown dye for kapa or as a medicine. The strong wood used to make spears, digging sticks, and adze handles.

Fun Facts: Name means "slippery like an octopus" (he'e is the Hawaiian name for an octopus).



Palapalai
Microlepia strigosa
Indigenous

Cata Lina, Denali, & Makeila

Description: Palapalai is also called the lace fern. Its leaves can grow more than 3 feet long. It is a shade plant found in dry or moderately wet areas. Found on all islands except Ni'ihau and Kaho'olawe.

Uses: Leaves used to make hula skirts and lei worn on the head and around neck and wrists. Also used to decorate hula altars.

Fun Facts: This plant is sacred to Laka, goddess of hula, and believed to be Laka's physical form.



Koki'o'ula
Hibiscus kokio
Endemic

Mina & Lilian

Description: Koki'o'ula has small red flowers which are smaller than the introduced hibiscus flowers. It grows as a bush with long branches. The glossy green leaves are 1 to 3.5 inches.

Uses: Leaves and bark used as a medicine for sore throat and blood purification. If used in a lei, the flower only lasts one day.

Fun Facts: Almost went extinct in the wild but is now being successfully propagated.



Kupukupu
Nephrolepis cordifolia
Indigenous

Makeila, Denali, & Cata Lina

Description: Kupukupu fronds stand erect and are about 1-2 feet tall. The bright green fronds form a triangular pattern. These ferns live in moist, shaded places like rainforests and by streams.

Uses: Used to decorate hula altars showing that it is a place of learning or sprouting knowledge. Kupu means to sprout or grow.

Fun Facts: The kupukupu fern is one of the first plants to appear on lava flows.



'Aki'a
Wikstroemia uva-ursi
Endemic

Rylen & Izak

Description: 'Aki'a is dense shrub that grows along the ground. When in bloom, tiny yellow flowers develop and turn into small orange or red fruits about 1/2 to 3/4 inch in diameter.

Uses: The bark was used to make rope and fishing line. The leaves and bark were used to stun fish so they could be caught more easily.

Fun Facts: When fish ingest the 'aki'a, they swim in a "drunken state" and can be scooped up.



Ki or Ti
Cordyline fruticosa
Indigenous

Brayden & Myli

Description: Ki leaves come in many colors - pink, red, and green. The leaves sprout from a woody trunk and are sword shaped. They can grow up to 2.5 feet long and 4 to 6 inches wide.

Uses: Leaves are used to wrap food for cooking and serving, as fishing lures on hukilau nets, and woven into sandals, hula skirts, rain capes, and lei.

Fun Facts: This plant is sacred to Laka, goddess of hula, and the god Lono. Ki is a symbol of high rank.



'Ohai
Sesbania tomentosa
Endemic

Naru & Kingston

Description: 'Ohai is a coastal plant that can grow up to 12 feet. They have reddish orange flowers that are about an inch long. These plants live for around 5 years.

Uses: The flower varies in color and shape which makes it a favorite lei flower. It is a good coastal plant for the stabilization of sand dunes.

Fun Facts: The leaf clusters at the stem tips have a fragrance that resembles nectarines.



Pili Grass
Heteropogon contortus
Indigenous

Naru, Adam, & Kingston

Description: Pili grows in bunches or tufts of light blueish-green leaf blades. Pili means to stick or cling and the tiny flowers at the top of the plant with clusters of seeds often become tangled.

Uses: Pili grass was used for thatching Hawaiian houses to make them rain proof. Also used as mattress stuffing because of its pleasant odor.

Fun Facts: Placed on hula altars for Laka in hopes that knowledge would pili or stick in their minds.



'Uki'uki
Dianella sandwicensis
Indigenous

Calym & Myka

Description: 'Uki'uki has leaves as long as 40 inches, purple berries, and small lily-like flowers that range in color from light blue to white with orange filaments.

Uses: The berries are used to make purple dyes while the dry berries can be used to make lei. The leaves were used for cordage and roof thatching.

Fun Facts: DON'T eat the berries. They taste terrible and will turn your whole mouth blue.



Kou
Cordia subcordata
Indigenous

Manoa & Dane

Description: Kou is an evergreen tree that grows to a height of about 30 feet. Its delicate orange flowers are scentless. The fruit grows in clusters with seed pods that turn from green to brown.

Uses: The wood was favored for carving food bowls because it does not affect the flavor of the food. Leaves used as a dye and to treat mouth infections.

Fun Facts: A fossil kou found on Kaua'i proved that kou was in Hawai'i before the Polynesians arrived.



Pōhinahina
Vitex rotundifolia
Indigenous

Miranda & Clara

Description: Pōhinahina has silvery green leaves and purple flowers that grow in bunches at the end of the branches. It has a sage scent and is found naturally along sandy, rocky shorelines.

Uses: The leaves were placed in kapa to keep insects away and could be used for a green dye. Also a medicine for headaches and stomach pain.

Fun Facts: Pōhinahina is an easy plant to grow and can handle drought, wind, salt, and heat.



Milo
Thespesia populnea
Indigenous/Canoe Plant

Katie & Natsuki

Description: Milo is a fast growing small tree or large shrub that reaches a height of 30 feet. It has triangular leaves, a yellow hibiscus-like flower, and seed capsules that turn from green to brown.

Uses: The wood was favored for making food bowls and platters. The bark was used for cordage while the fruit was used as a dye and medicine.

Fun Facts: This sacred tree surrounded the house of Kamehameha I in Waikiki.



Lē'ahi / Diamond Head State Monument

STATE OF HAWAII / Department of Land and Natural Resources / Division of State Parks



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