

La'au Trail

Below are the names and descriptions of a number of traditional healing plants and herbs (la'au) that can be found as you enjoy the the La'au Trail.



KALO (Taro)

In Hawai'i, Kalo has been a staple food since earliest times. All parts of the plant are eaten; its starchy root as pa'i'ai or poi and its leaves as lu'au. The raw sap of the stem can be used medicinally for insect bites to prevent swelling. A piece of its cooked root is applied to the skin to aid in the healing of cuts, rashes and bruises. According to Hawaiian legend, Kalo is the first Hawaiian descendent—the most senior elder and older brother to humans.



LĀ'Ī (Ti Leaf)

Lā'ī is a canoe plant brought to Hawai'i by the earliest Polynesian settlers. Lā'ī was used for cooking, making bundles, roof thatching, rain coats, sandals and hula skirts. The pure green flat leaf variety can be used for cooling fevers, headaches, and bandages for wounds. It was also used to wrap warm stones to apply to aching muscles.



NONI (Indian Mulberry)

Noni is a small tree or shrub in the coffee family found in Asia, Australia and in the Pacific and a common medicinal plant used in Hawai'i and Polynesia. Its fermented juice is used for diabetes, high blood pressure, sty eye, and to kill head lice. Ripe Noni was used as a poultice to help heal boils, wounds, sprains and fractures.



'AWA (Kawa)

The Kawa shrub is native to the Pacific Islands. Its roots are used to make 'awa, a narcotic drink for numbing aches and pains. Native Hawaiians did not use 'awa as a social drink but used it medicinally. The bitterness of the 'awa was a lesson to people who consumed it to make them strong, reminding them of the bitterness in life and the importance of living with humility.



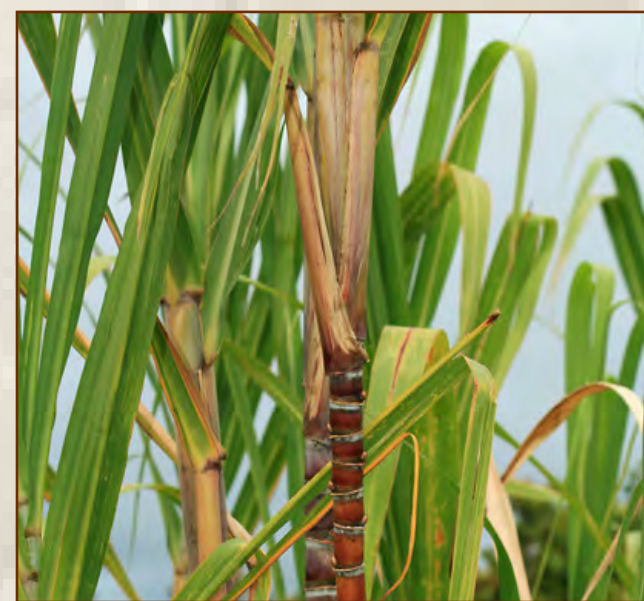
KUKUI (Candlenut Tree)

Kukui is a canoe plant brought to Hawai'i by early Polynesians. Ancient Hawaiians burned kukui nuts strung on the rib of a coconut leaf to provide light. Kukui is a strong laxative and its sap is a remedy for thrush in young children. Kukui nut oil is high in healthy omega-3 fatty acids and is an excellent skin moisturizer and can help prevent stretch marks.



UALA (Sweet Potato)

Brought to Hawai'i by early Polynesians, uala is an important food staple for Hawaiians. Traditionally, its tubers were baked in the imu (underground oven) but today it is commonly steamed or boiled. Young leaves can also be cooked and eaten. Both tubers and leaves provide a high nutritional source of complex carbohydrates, protein, vitamins A and C, and calcium.



KŌ (Sugar Cane)

Before sugar became a thriving agricultural crop, Kō was used medicinally in Hawai'i as a secondary ingredient in Hawaiian medicine. It would help the taste of bitter medicine as well as stimulate the healing process as the sugar would crystallize and bring the elements of the la'au (herbs) together.



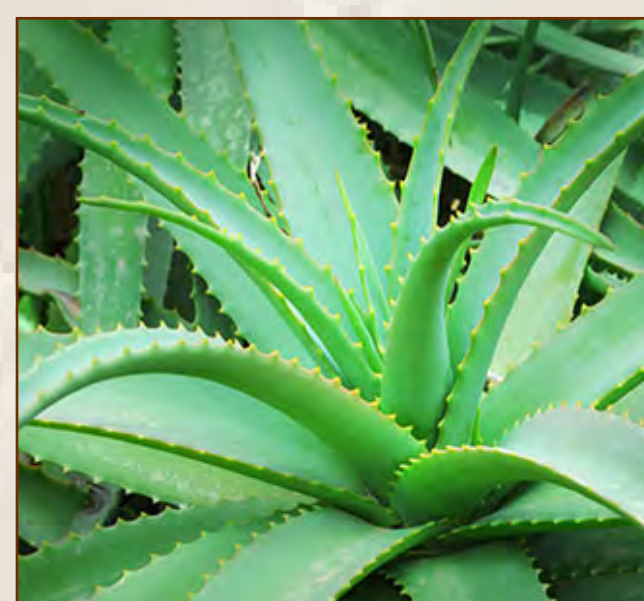
MĀMAKI

Māmaki is an indigenous Hawaiian tree or shrub with green leaves containing prominent red veins and edible white berries. Māmaki leaf tea can help lower high blood pressure and blood sugar level, reduce cholesterol, and relieve stress and fatigue. Māmaki tea and berries were used traditionally to relax tense muscles prior to childbirth. Diabetic patients should consult with their doctor and closely monitor their blood sugar level due to the tea's effect on blood sugar levels.



KUPUKUPU (Sword Fern)

Hawaiians used Kupukupu for lei making and religious purposes. Kupukupu was placed on a kuahu (hula altar) for knowledge to kupu (sprout). A'ala kupukupu ka uka o Kānehoa (fragrant with ferns is inland of Kānehoa) was chanted during the formal traditional dressing of a hula dancer.



PĀNINI 'AWA'AWA (Aloe vera)

Malihini (foreigners) brought aloe to Hawai'i. It has been well known for centuries for its healing properties around the world. It is easily grown and can be ingested internally as a purgative. The juice from the gel is used externally to treat cuts, insect bites, sunburns, rashes, burns and wounds.



'ALA'ALAWAINUI (Arid-land peperomia)

This small succulent with thick leaves contains a lot of juice. It is most commonly found in wet environments and known to taste like black pepper. It was used to make a rich gray dye from the ashes of the plant for printing of kapa (Hawaiian cloth). It helps prepare the womb for pregnancy.

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‘AHINAHINA (Mauna Kea Silversword)

‘Ahinahina is a soft, silvery shrub found on the slopes of Mauna Kea and Haleakala. Its silvery, soft leaves adapted their color to reflect the intense sunlight. The leaves make a beautiful ornament on lei haku and lei wili. The leaves were also used as a tea or pounded up and ingested for respiratory issues, most commonly asthma.



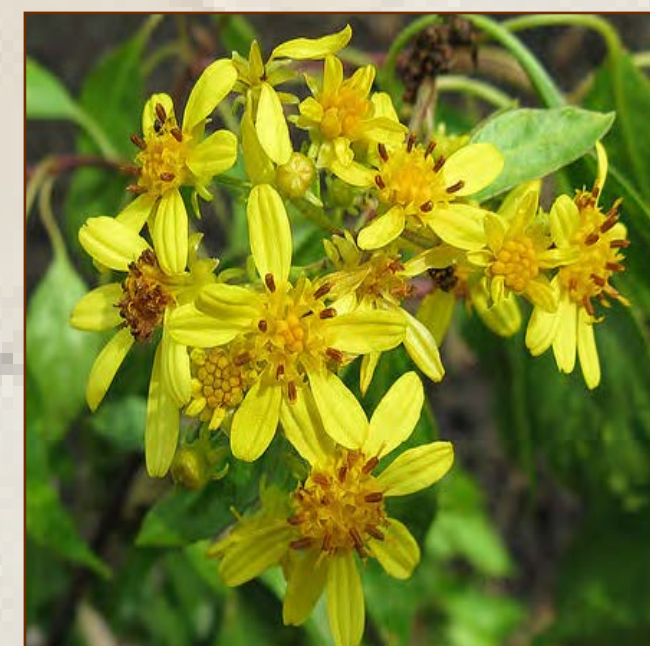
‘ILIMA

‘Ilima is a small to large native shrub. Its yellow-orange flowers are O‘ahu’s official flower and used for lei making and medicine. The flower was commonly chewed and given to babies as a mild laxative. The flower was also used to prepare the womb for pregnancy.



‘ULU (Breadfruit)

The breadfruit tree is distributed throughout tropical Asia and Polynesia. Its fruit is an important food source and is enjoyed in a variety of recipes. The fruit can also be cooked and pounded into poi. When baked in an imu, it has a doughy consistency which is how it got its common name. The wood was excellent to make wood implements and was favored for poi boards. ‘Ulu tree sap is a strong adhesive. It was said that one ‘ulu tree can feed a family for fifty years.



KO‘KO‘OLAU

Endemic to Hawai‘i, this small shrub has dark green serrated leaves with small bright yellow flowers. The leaves can be steeped and used as a tonic and blood purifier. It helps stomach ailments and to stimulate appetite.



NIU (Coconut)

The Coconut is a common palm in tropical islands of the Pacific and warm parts of Eastern Asia. The nuts provide water, milk and food, the leaves used for weaving and house thatching, and the wood used to make traditional pahu (drums). The fiber from the husk is excellent fire fuel and is used to make cordage and as a strainer for coconut milk. Coconut oil restores and hydrates skin and hair, and is used in preserving wood products.



‘AKOKO

‘Akoko is a small shrub with green leaves that turn dark red right before falling off. The dark red leaves are the most potent and are used for a variety of female reproductive problems including infertility and postnatal womb problems.



NEEM (Indian Lilac)

Neem is an evergreen East Indian tree widely cultivated in tropical Asia for its timber, resin, bark, and aromatic seed oil, which is used medicinally and as an insecticide. In India, it is known as the “tree of life” and “village pharmacy” as it treats more than 40 different ailments. Eating one young shoot a day is said to keep the doctors away.



KUAWA (Guava)

Guava trees are native to tropical America. Hawaiians adopted this plant and used the fruit and leaves for medicine. The fruit can help loosen stool while the young leaf shoots are used to stop diarrhea. The fruit is also made into an enjoyable jelly, jam and fruit juice.



AWAPUHI (Ginger)

There are several types of ginger that made its way from India to Hawai‘i. The ‘awapuhi melemele (yellow ginger) and ‘awapuhi ke‘oke‘o (white ginger) both have fragrant flowers that bloom during the summertime and make beautiful lei. The flower can be used for congestion and respiratory problems and the juice of the root is used for wounds, cuts and burns.



MĪKANA (Papaya)

Mikana is easily cultivated in the tropics and is a favorite fruit in Hawai‘i. The small black seeds inside the fruit can be swallowed whole to aid in digestion and eliminating intestinal worms. The leaves and green fruit are used to tenderize meat overnight. The sap is used to treat wounds, sores, and bee stings.



MAI‘A (Banana)

Grown in the tropics, banana is valued there as well as temperate zones for its flavor, nutritional value and constant availability. The ripe fruit is low in protein and fat and high in carbohydrates, potassium, and vitamins C and A. It is eaten after taking bitter medicine. The ancient Hawaiians forbid women to eat mai‘a, considering it a delicacy only eaten during feasts by chiefs and priests. It became a staple only during famine.



‘ŌLENA (Turmeric)

‘Olena is a king of ginger distributed from Southeast Asia into Polynesia and widely used as a spice and dye in foods, and to color cloth and tapa. Hawaiians use the juice from the rhizome to treat ear, throat and sinus ailments.