

**H**ow does a plant scientist and cut-flower breeder—someone whose job it is to help develop the new varieties that will appear on the market in coming years—understand the needs and wants of florists?

This past summer, Eric Tanouye of Green Point Nurseries in Hawaii had an idea: why not offer that person the opportunity to participate in a hands-on design workshop? The participants were researchers from the University of Hawaii, which has played a powerful role over the past 40 years, helping Hawaiian horticulture to develop into the dynamic industry it is today.

"They were eager to do it because they really wanted to get that perspective," says Hitomi Gilliam AIFD, who ran the workshop with Maui-based designer and florist Lois Hiranaga AIFD. "In the process of actually creating designs, they would say things like, 'I wish this stem were longer!' They really got it."

The workshop took place just prior to the 2016 MIDPAC Horticultural Conference, an annual event that celebrates the quality and diversity of Hawaiian horticultural products. From the low-lying coastal areas on up to the highest elevations, and with dramatically differing amounts of rainfall on the leeward and windward sides of the islands, Hawaii is home to as many as 11 distinct climate zones, conducive to a wide variety of crops.

**MAKING CONNECTIONS** The Hawaiian horticulture industry

also caters to a wide range of customers, from big-box stores to independent retail florists. Like the breeders at the University of Hawaii, many Hawaiian growers say they are eager to hear from florists and designers about their needs and wants.

"Work with us," says Elton Mow of Orchid Plantation, a grower who sits on the board of directors for the cut-flower division of the Hawaii Floriculture and Nursery Association. "Tell us what colors you want, what stem lengths. It might take some time to produce it, but we can grow whatever you want!"

Direct communication between growers and retailers makes more sense than ever in the case of Hawaiian tropicals, Elton argues: "Many growers on Hawaii are rather small, so we're able and willing to deliver smaller quantities to retailers. We can get you a variety box. And with airfreight service, you can get product very quickly from Hawaii, so it's very fresh."

Florists and designers do certainly benefit when they get to know growers and their products. Visitors to the MIDPAC conference had the opportunity for up-close conversations with Hawaiian growers and exporters, along with visits to nurseries and shipping locations. These are just a few glimpses of the riches on offer.

For more about Hawaiian-grown flowers, foliage and plants, visit:

- [www.hawaiiflowers.com](http://www.hawaiiflowers.com)
- [www.greenpointnursery.com](http://www.greenpointnursery.com)
- [www.hawaiiantropicals.com](http://www.hawaiiantropicals.com)
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The latest in cut flowers, foliage & plants from the Aloha State

# ISLAND BEAUTIFUL



**AWESOME ANTHURIUMS**  
Hawaii's signature cut-flower crop, anthuriums can represent the islands' diversity all by themselves, since more than 100 varieties are available, from shell-pink tulip anthuriums to gigantic, wavy, bicolored obakes. As seen here in photos from Green Point Nurseries, one of the largest anthurium growers, most anthuriums are grown outdoors, under shade cloth, in "cinder"—the porous, organic material that results from Hawaii's volcanic lava flows. Once abundant and inexpensive, cinder is becoming scarce and more expensive, but it's the perfect growing medium for many Hawaiian crops. At Green Point, slow-release synthetic fertilizer is added to the cinder. Periodically, tissue analysis is performed on whole leaves to be sure the plant is getting the right amount of minerals for sturdy growth. As the plants grow, they send out roots that become exposed above the cinder; the roots are then tenderly covered with a little more cinder, which makes them stronger. Flowers are left on the plant until they are relatively mature, which means they will last longer in the vase. The plants yield only six flowers a year, or perhaps four in the case of obakes—"so to us every flower is very precious," says Green Point's operations manager Neo Thong Teng. "We want them to be perfect." At upper left on the opposite page, Neo holds up a box of mixed anthuriums in a single-layer pack. With this packing method, each stem is inserted individually into the pack for maximum security and protection during transit. The older way to pack anthuriums for shipping (also used, as seen at center lower left) is with paper placed between the blooms to protect them.

Text and photography by Bruce Wright

A VAST AND CHANGING MIX Neotropica, the Hawaii Tropical Flowers & Plant Guide, lists and pictures over 750 different cut flowers, leaves and plants supplied from Hawaii. Many are available year-round, but some—like the fuzzy hanging heliconia seen at lower right on this page—flush only for a month or so, then vanish until next year.

“Almost every type of heliconia is like that,” says Grayson Inouye of Pacific Floral Exchange, a grower and shipper with a highly diverse export business, “but one or another type of heliconia is always in season. The fuzzy ones are very showy. You don’t know whether to look at them or pet them, eh?”

Pacific Floral Exchange, Grayson explains, operates “kind of like a co-op to market flowers grown by about 50 independent growers including 10 orchid growers, 20 tropical flower growers, and various growers of foliage. We do have strict quarantine rules. We need to do a hot-water treatment on pretty much all of the tropicals.” The water is heated to 112 degrees, hot enough to kill insects, and flowers or foliage is immersed in the hot water for ten minutes, like the red ti leaves seen at right above. Then it is moved to a tank of cool water where it cools off very quickly.

Other flowers on view at Pacific Floral Exchange in July included pink and red gingers (*Alpinia purpurata*, at near right, which are “pretty much perennials,” says Grayson,



with just a slight increase of supply in summer and a decrease in winter) and beehive gingers (*Zingiber spectabile*, upper left, opposite page), which tend to come and go more quickly. Bright red *Costus woodsonii* (top photo, above) is available year-round, as are the fuzzy pods of achiote (*Bixa orellana*), also known as lipstick tree—used not only as an ornamental but as a source of red dye and of the condiment, annatto.



ORCHID FANCIES “The selling point for orchids is novelty,” says Mike Hughes of Hawaiian Tropicals Direct, a nursery that grows both potted orchids and cut-flower orchids, though the focus is on the pots, which what Mike sees as the growth area. Demand is high for scented varieties and for orchids with unusual colors and distinctive markings. Prices for these types of orchids have remained high while they have fallen for the more standard varieties, like a white phalaenopsis orchids. You might think the specialty items would be selling through specialty outlets, where a knowledgeable sales person could promote them and give them an added-value presentation—but Mike says it’s the mass-market, big-box customers who are driving the demand for novelty, while traditional retail florists, he finds, mostly just want the white phales.

Mike specializes in dendrobiums and intergeneric orchids (IGOs), but about 10 percent of his production is devoted to specialty orchids like the white and purple wild cattleya at lower near left. Demand is so high that he doesn’t really need to market his flowers beyond exhibiting at a couple of trade shows every year. “Our campaign is called Hawaii,” he says. “It’s about leveraging the romance of the islands. Plus, knowledgeable buyers know that Hawaii-grown orchids are the best.”



For every sales opportunity, there's a standout design with versatile, high-value tropicals.

# ALL HAWAIIAN,

# ALL OCCASIONS

LONG-LASTING AND distinctive, with all the prestige of premium product—what's not to like about tropical flowers and foliage? Still, many florists are held back by a

stereotyped idea of what can be done with them. "Sometimes it takes a little extra creativity to get tropicals into the mix," says Hitomi Gilliam AIFD. "But that's what

keeps customers coming back." At this year's MIDPAC Horticultural Conference, Hitomi showed how adaptable and multifaceted tropical flowers can be.



At left, red and white anthuriums are arranged with dendrobium and aranthera orchids using an egg-shaped pillow made of chicken wire as a grid that sits on top of the clear glass vase. The grid makes it easy to change the water by lifting the entire bouquet out as a unit and then replacing it in the vase.



**VERY VALENTINE** "What flower better represents Valentine's Day than a red anthurium?" Hitomi asks. At right, she nestled a pair of heart-shaped anthuriums on top of another heart, made with one-inch flat wire. She used the wire shape as a cookie cutter on floral foam, then wrapped the back and sides of the foam with plastic and laid it into the heart. The top is covered with florets of 'Azima' aranthera orchids, of a beautiful pure red color.



**A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND** At left and above, a single strand of Diamond Wrap lends glamour to a phalaenopsis orchid and an anthurium-and-orchid bouquet. To give them more body, the diamonds can be secured to aluminum wire by wrapping the two together with bullion. The orchid is additionally accented with white midollino, bulked up with a wrapping of recycled plastic bags and then covered with wired white wool. The wool repeats a texture found at the base of the orchid, where Hitomi has wrapped the root ball in moss-green yarn, which retains moisture beautifully and makes the orchid easy to water with a squeeze bottle.

Floral designs by Hitomi Gilliam AIFD



## ALL OCCASIONS

FOR DAD, ADVENTURE Tropicals for men isn't a new idea—but consider this: "When you go to shows for people who cultivate and collect orchids, or dahlias, or bonsais, most of them are men," says Hitomi. "Which says to me that men do like flowers—but what they like best are intriguing botanical specimens." The ensemble at left certainly fills the bill, dominated by kangaroo paws, beehive ginger, and a stalk of deep red miniature ti leaves (*Cordilyne fruticosa*).

**EASTER PARADE** As an alternative to Easter lilies, pure white anthuriums lend their long-lasting elegance to a contemporary design (above left) that evokes both the crucifixion and the ascension, with a scaffolding of skewers tied with neatly clipped brown zip ties. Above right, oncidium orchids offer "Hawaii's answer to forsythia." Hitomi purchased a wood round at a home improvement store, drilled holes in it and inserted garden stakes, some with water tubes wired onto them. The holes and water tubes support a medley of the oncidiums along with beehive ginger, yellow pincushion proteas, and lichen branches, all wrapped with passionflower vines. In the design at right, color matching offers an effective strategy for taking something inexpensive and making it look like more. "The peach-colored container is plastic and cost \$2.50—but I knew it would go perfectly with the peach anthuriums," says Hitomi, a beautiful backdrop for orchids, little balls of pink yarn, and broken eggshells—as though the Easter chicks have just hatched. Leafy vines and maidenhair ferns put the finishing touch on a delicate, transparent look that you might have thought wasn't possible with tropicals.



**ORCHIDS FOR MOM** Don't call this a European garden or planted basket, Hitomi suggests: "Sell it as an orchid collection" that is presented with a fresh cut-flower component, designed in floral foam (including the green leucadendron). Emphasize that when the fresh flowers fade, the plants can and should be taken out and placed all around the house, where they will get the individual attention they need and deserve, with different requirements for water and light. The green and purple leaves of the large vriesea (bromeliad) nicely complement the purples of the orchids.





## ALL OCCASIONS

**WALL FLOWERS** In the same way that a flower wall does, a column like the one at far left, with all the flowers facing outward, offers a way to get maximum visual value from your materials, Hitomi explains: "When you design on the vertical, each flower is seen full on." She created the column by stacking bricks of foam on top of each other, each with plastic underneath it to keep the moisture from draining all the way to the bottom, and stabilized the structure with bamboo skewers taped together on the outside of the stack. She then covered the foam with yarn (which helps to retain moisture) all the way up.

**SOFT AND DRIPPY** Nothing cascades quite like dendrobium orchids. To elevate them, Hitomi began with an inexpensive lamp from a discount store: "The lines are clean, you just rip out the cord, and it makes a cost-effective pedestal," with the lantern part used as a receptacle for foam. Green and white anthuriums jut from the center mass of the bouquet, lending depth and grace; ruffle fern brings in a feathery, delicate texture.

**FOR THE BANQUET** For the long "feasting table" that is trendy for weddings now, brides often want a scattering of bud vases, thinking that will be simple and inexpensive. For a different look, and a more convenient setup, Hitomi prefers to offer them something like this one-by-four plank, converted into a rentable and reusable prop with drilled holes and water tubes wired onto short stakes. Wax flowers are just now being tested as a potential new Hawaiian crop. Together with vines and ferns, they lend a lightness and softness to a collection of orchids, anthuriums and tillandsias. 🌿

