



NEWS RELEASE

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FLOWERING MAUI

Tropical blossoms and fragrant lei add
tender beauty to local agriculture

MAUI, Hawai'i – Skilled agriculturists, the Hawaiian people of old revered the native island plants that they encountered in the wild. They were constantly aware that each species had a role to play in the fragile interdependence of island life, the very life they had become a part of. They celebrated achievements with natural adornments of flowers, seeds, and fragrant maile vines. They scented their kapa cloth with aromatic sandalwood and used pandanus pollen to soothe irritated skin. They cared deeply for the plants around them, welcoming the pure joy and beauty they brought.

Today's diversified agriculture has eagerly embraced the Hawaiians' innate sense of delight, extending itself well beyond edible crops. Gravity defying floral arrangements in resort lobbies, colorful botanical gardens, dramatic protea fields and working nurseries are all part of the flowering of the Maui Nui landscape. Today, flower and nursery products contribute the largest value in diversified agriculture statewide and Maui Nui counts at least 180 floriculture and nursery operations, many of which ship flowers to the mainland.

Maui's prize flower is the protea. They are flowers that do not resemble flowers and come in myriad varieties with unusual names – pink mink, pincushion, sunburst, blackbeard, orange frost and more. Upcountry Kula excels in protea. Tours can be arranged at Anuhea Farm in Olinda, just above Makawao town, where 14 planted acres dazzle with the crop. Right across the road, The Kula Experiment Station of the University of Hawai'i Maui Agricultural Research Center researches new protea varieties as well as other southern hemisphere flora. A free map provides a self guided tour; make



sure to stop by at the All-American Rose Garden, an unexpected Maui oasis with the most beautiful and newest of delicate rose hybrids.

Intricate, colorful, and as diverse as protea, tropical orchids have captured the imagination for centuries. Also in Olinda, at about a 2,100-foot elevation, Dan Judson runs Orchids of Olinda. In Ha'ikū, the huge clean and neat greenhouses at Exotic Orchids of Maui hold many varieties, hundreds of plants, and thousands of blooms. The company has been producing some of the finest orchid hybrids available in today's hobbyist market.

Most flower farms, including the two mentioned above, are working farms, not agri-tourist destinations. To just wander around, to experience unique floriculture rooted in the land, you want to visit Maui Nui's gardens. Kula Botanical Garden and Enchanting Floral Gardens are high elevation gardens in Kula, spread across eight acres and featuring hundreds of species of tropical and sub-tropical plants. Along the famous Hāna Highway you'll find Garden of Eden, 26 acres of trails alive with brilliant colors and rare trees.

In Central Maui, on the road to 'Īao Valley, is Tropical Gardens of Maui, a four acre botanical garden and nursery that was started in 1987 as a showcase for tropical plants from all parts of the world. Among the unique plants that can be seen growing is the orchid plant *Grammatophyllum speciosum* that in its native land is the largest orchid in the world. The self guided tour through the garden crosses 'Īao Stream, passing a koi pond and palm grotto. The hillside above has been terraced and planted with numerous varieties of Hawaiian taro.

A 60 acre working plantation spanning 60 acres, Maui Tropical Plantation is located a few miles from downtown Wailuku off Honoapi'ilani Highway. More like an agricultural park with fields of tropical fruits and flowers, its landscaped grounds include tropical exotics such as giant bromeliads, gingers, and anthuriums. A narrated tour aboard an open tram allows for photo stops along the way. The visitor center includes exhibits as well as a large gift shop and a tropical plant nursery.

As for the tradition of flower lei, the warm welcome millions of visitors to Maui Nui receive each year, this tradition opens to the heart of the rich legacy of ancient Hawai'i. It symbolizes joy, beauty, and generosity, and it's the graceful bridge between human beings and the bounty of the land.

In ancient days, garlands made with flowers, seeds, shells, and foliage served to beautify and distinguish. They were an integral part of Hawaiian cultural practices, most notably in the hula dance. Today, lei continue to be used for myriad reasons. They extend friendship, love, appreciation, best wishes, welcome and farewell. Lei are always



appreciated. Any day is lei day in Hawai‘i, and it is more than okay to purchase one for yourself.

On the island of Maui, Paradise Flower Farms is a lei flower farm in Kula that grows plumeria, fragrant tuberose, exotic orchids, ti, and American rose varieties. The 51-acre farm will sew you your lei and also sells lei making supplies.

But better yet, pick your own flowers and string your own lei. As several Maui Nui resorts offer lei stringing as part of their activities. The flower most typically used is plumeria, also known as frangipani. During plantation and steamship days, hundreds of plumeria flowers would float in the ocean as travelers came and went. Visitors will find the largest producer of plumeria in the State of Hawai‘i on Moloka‘i, where Moloka`i Plumerias hosts morning tours by appointment. You’ll roam the scented orchard and are invited to select your own blossoms and make a lei.

Infused with cultural meaning, environmental beauty, and agricultural fertility, the ‘āina of Maui Nui merges sustainability with sheer pleasure through its flowers. From smiling birds of paradise to exotic protea and lei, flowers are its expression of aloha. To see Maui’s flowers and the soil from which they come brings one closer to one’s soul. Flowers make it easy to understand the spirit of Mālama Maui, the reason we must protect and celebrate our cultural and natural environments.

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