

'A'ala 'Iliahi

Student Reader

Ahhh, do you smell that? This may have been said by the sea captain as he recognized the sweet scent of sandalwood on his ship. It is 1790 and he has just replenished his ship's wood supply on Kaua'i Island. The distinct smell of sandalwood has captured his attention just as it has captured the attention of people in other parts of the world. The native Hawaiian people knew it as 'iliahi and this discovery by a foreigner was about to change their lives.



Butch Haase



Forest and Kim Starr

In Hawai'i, there are 6 native endemic species of 'iliahi and many sub species of sandalwood. It is sometimes referred to as lā'au'ula or 'aoa. Although 'iliahi can still be found on most of the main Hawaiian Islands, they are considered rare and one has been declared endangered. 'Iliahi are mostly found in the higher reaches of the forest. The largest grove of 'iliahi can be found on the slopes of Maunaloa, Hawai'i Island. Today, many organizations in Hawai'i are involved in the restoration of 'iliahi.

'Iliahi can grow up to be a large tree of 40 feet or more. Their leaves tend to be a bluish-green color, leathery, and look wilted. Its flowers range through shades of yellow, green and red. The fruits are purplish-black when ripe and are fleshy and juicy. The nuts of the fruit can be eaten.



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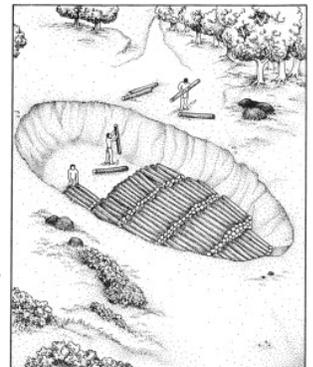
The 'iliahi is a hemi-parasite (part parasite). Unlike parasites, that take all of their nutrients from their host, 'iliahi only takes a certain percentage of nutrients from its host plants. Those needed nutrients are extracted by the long roots of the 'iliahi that attach to the roots of the host plants. Some native plants that host the 'iliahi are 'a'alii, koa, and 'ōhai. However, the 'iliahi is not particular when it comes to a host. There was a case of an 'iliahi and strawberry plant growing together in a pot and the 'iliahi was getting its nutrients from the roots of the strawberry plant.



'Ūkēkē made of 'iliahi - Mahi La Pierre

Native Hawaiians used 'iliahi for many things. They combined 'iliahi with other plants for medicine to treat different diseases and afflictions. It was used to scent and color their kapa and to scent the stuffing of their pillows. Lei were made from the flowers and leaves of the 'iliahi. 'Ūkēkē, the only known Hawaiian string instrument, was made from the wood of the 'iliahi. Kupuna David Kupuhea, shared that 'iliahi was the best of all the woods used to make the pola (deck) of the double hulled canoes.

The prize of the 'iliahi is the perfume-like smell of its oil that is produced by the plant and stored in its heartwood. The perfume-like smell continues to be released from the wood 60 years after it is cut. It is because of this valuable oil that sandalwood became endangered in Hawai'i and around the world. The desire for the oil caused much hardship and suffering everywhere that sandalwood was collected, especially here in Hawai'i. Located in the Molokai Forest Reserve is a lua (depression) named "Lua Moku Iliahi". On Moloka'i, it is a reminder of those difficult days.



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