

‘Ohi‘ohikūpua is the name of the hala tree.

Its origins are said to belong to the Kanaloa clan, initially sprouting during the time of Pō in the kaiuli, or the depths of the ocean in Tahiti. It grew broad and vast under the sea and reached for the surface during the time of Ao. One day, the tip of the hala tree peered through the ilikai – the skin of the ocean’s surface, entering into the atmospheric realm of Lononui‘ākea. Hala started popping up all over Kahiki.

According to one of many mo‘olelo, the first hala plant arrives in Hawai‘i on the canoe of Pele’s travel from Polapola. When arriving at Halahalanui, Kōhala on the island of Hawai‘i, Pele was entangled by the roots of the hala. Her frustrations led to her furiously breaking the ule hala and flying them across the land, spreading it out all over. Kamapua‘a, who follows Pele from Tahiti digs the earth giving a fresh foundation for hala to grow.

Pele’s mother Haumea was the younger sibling to Lauhiki, who pulls the knowledge together to be the first womang to plait the lau of the hala. Her patterns and weaving are so well known, that a man named Lonoauhi asked her to make a sail for his canoe which was round like the sun. Lonoauhi’s journeys took him throughout the pacific spreading the knowledge of Lauhiki’s weaving and sail making technique.

Lauhiki taught all the women, who were Goddesses, to weave including her sister Haumea and their daughters named Ka-meha-i-kaua, Mea-hani-pāoa, Lohea, Ka-huihui-ma-lanai and Ka-hoa-noho-o-ka-‘ohu.

Kahuihuimalanai and Kahoanohooka‘ohu were the first to take the drupes from the hua hala and string the first lei hala, a custom and tradition that is continued to this day. Ka-hoa-noho-o-ka-‘ohu was the name of Kamehamhea Nui’s sail for his wa‘a peleleu.

It is important for us to remember and continue to spread the origins of hala, and its ‘ike throughout the generation as we ‘a‘apo or grasp its knowledge while tilling through the various patterns and techniques – just as Kamapua‘a did by creating a foundation for hala to grow.

Alternate Mo‘olelo of Hala coming to Hawai‘i

In the Hawaiian creation change Kumulipo, the pahaha or young mullet in the sea was born. The aerial roots, or ule hala provided protection for the pahaha from large predators. Young mullet would spawn in the tidal pools, the kaheka or fishponds called loko‘ia. Hala trees can be found growing on the edges of the kaheka or fish ponds. However, if completely submerged in salt water, the hala will not survive.

When Pele was traveling to Hawaii escaping Namakaokahai’s wrath, she was slowed and entangled in the hala. Her relative Pa‘ao was travelling the great sea at the same time, and notice Pele struggling. He went over and grabbed a pail of salt water and poured the water from the top of the tree, the leaves wilted away and the hala weakened loosening Pele from her bondage.

The first Pūhala: another mo‘olelo version

Pele’s brother, Kamohoali‘i, is said to have planted the first hala tree in the Hawaiian islands. He brought the hala fruit cluster (‘āhui hala) on the canoe from Kahiki in case the Pele family needed the fruit for food. When they were hungry, they ate the soft, inner ends of the fuit keys (pua hala). The also saved the hard ends of the hala keys (iwi hala) for planting.

*When the Pele clan arrived on the island of Hawai‘i, Kamohoali‘i planted the hala seeds in Puna. A magical pūhala sprouted which was always laden with fruit. The tree was named **Manu‘uke‘eu**. From the fruit of this tree came the seeds that were planted and grown on every island in Hawai‘i.*

