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Hawaiian Lei – a Floriculture Design Lab

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Introduction

The first botanist to publish a list of plants Hawaiians were using in making lei was Charles Gaudichaud-Beaupre in 1819. His listing did not go beyond the superficial and decorative beauty of the lei. The deeper cultural significance of lei in making and wearing, in ritual and in hula, and in myth and legend were not appreciated by Westerners until many years later. The lei is a classical art form associated with all aspects of traditional Hawaiian life (MacDonald and Weissich, 2003).

One of the symbols of Hawaii that comes to mind is the Lei, a necklace of flowers (usually) given to arriving and departing tourists. Lei, however, can be worn for many different reasons: celebrations, recognition, anniversaries, weddings and as personal adornment. The image of a hula dancer almost always includes a lei.



Happy graduates celebrate Commencement!

Across the U.S. Mainland, lei worn by students from Hawaii at their graduations have sparked interest from their friends and others who would like to wear one, too

Flower sources do not have to be based on the traditional tropical flowers as many garden annuals are adaptable for the purpose. For the traditional May Day lei competition in Honolulu, some lei makers seek out appropriate flowers and foliage at the local wholesale flower outlet. While the traditional lei are composed of flowers and foliage, small fruits and seeds can also be used, and many lei use only parts of a flower.

References:

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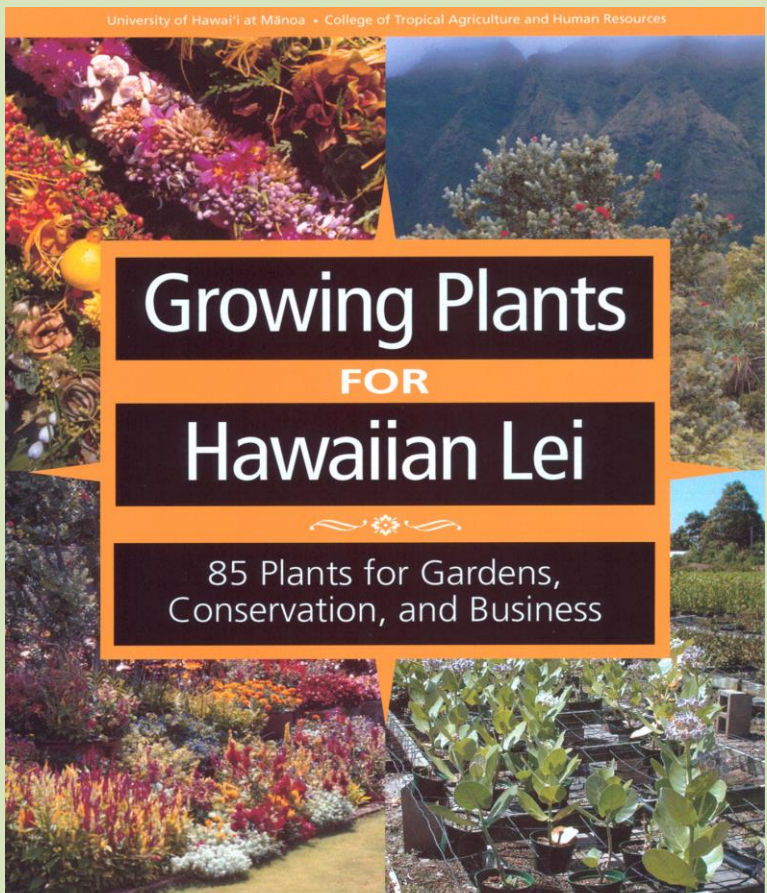
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Classes in lei-making are held in Hawaii by long-term practitioners of the art under sponsorship of botanical gardens, parks & recreation departments, and some hotels. At the University of Hawaii, our introductory ornamentals class includes a lab on lei construction.

Bill Char, Master Lei craftsman and Guest instructor

This poster grew out of the recognition that floriculture labs in mainland universities could develop similar classes both for student enjoyment and as possible fund-raising opportunities. Construction techniques are rather similar to the old-fashioned wrist corsages.

1 Hr 15 min video: <https://youtu.be/dv7exBW1jxw>

QR Code link to video



Examples of Lei



Kui poepoe
Huapala, dracaena
Kui pololei
Blue jade & Carnation
Hyacinth
Kui pololei
Plumeria



Wili and Haku styles in various color themes.



Trays of flowers and foliage are prepared in advance. In this lab 3 strands of raffia were used in a haku-style lei. Students show off their creations.



Gathered from the landscape
Bougainvillea, Nehe, Galphimia,
Marigolds, buds & flowers of Cae-
salpinia, Saraca



Lei Pāpale
(Hat lei)



Haku style wristlet



Humupapa – sewn to a backing



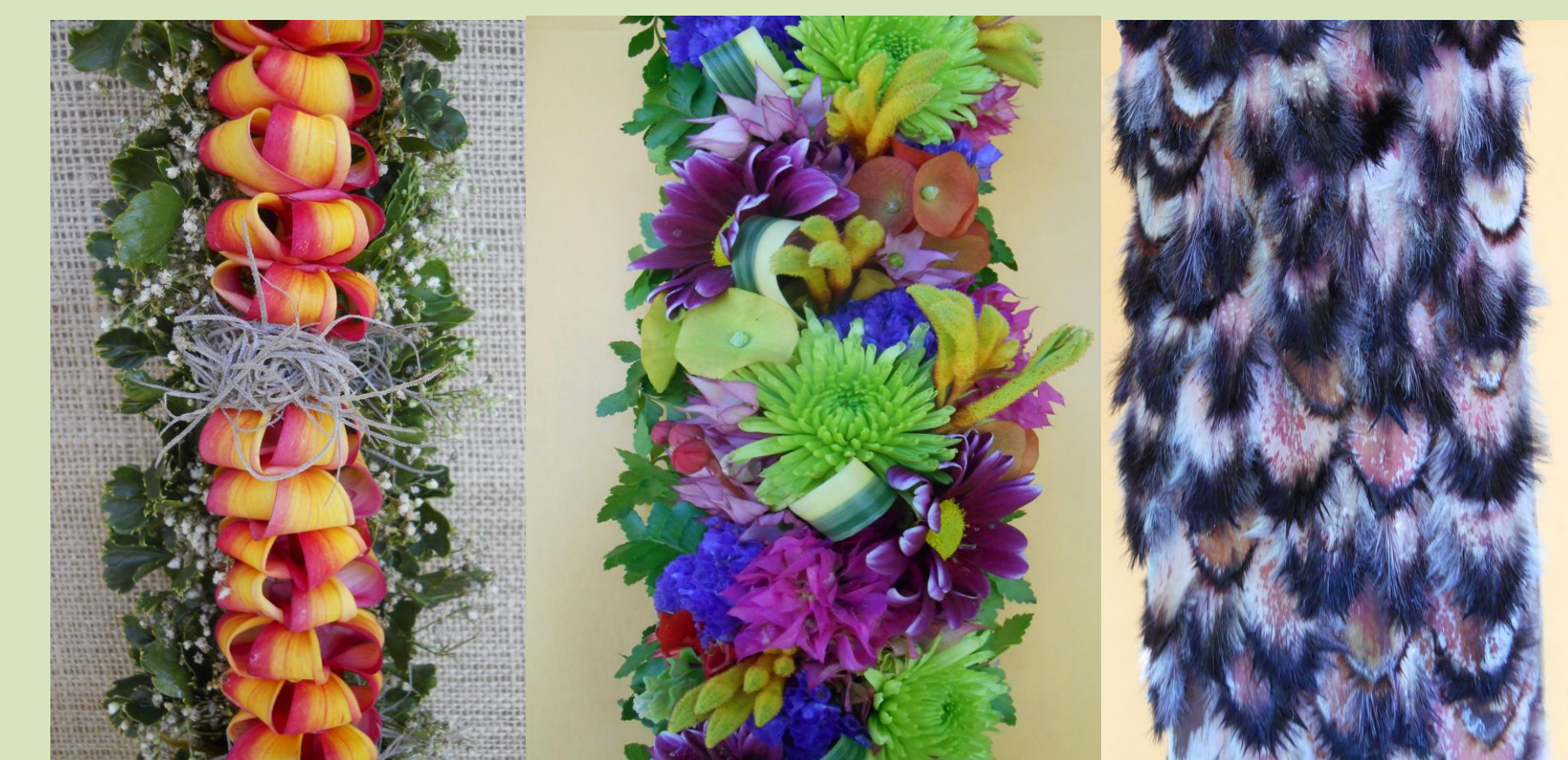
Wili – finished with fern backing



Wili – tied with raffia



Hili of ti leaves
All-foliage Haku
Wili – Yellow
Multiple lei strands



Plumeria kui pololei
Haku – multi-colored
Humupapa of
Protea bracts



Sourced from Wholesale Florist: Gypsophila, Statice, Trachelium, and others shown in lei segments on right side of this poster.

Lei styles:

Haku: Braiding flowers, leaves, and/or fruit in a three-strand plait of fern, ti leaf, hau fiber or other natural fiber such as raffia.

Hili: Braiding or weaving of a single plant material

Humupapa: Plant materials are sewn to a foundation of dried banana fiber, lauhala (Pandanus), ti leaf or other suitable natural materials.

Kui: Plant materials are strung together through the center (Kui pololei) or side (Kui poepoe). *Kui lau* is a flat lei. For some flowers, multiple strands are worn.

Kīpu'u: The stems or leaves are knotted together to make a chain. No cordage or needle is used.

Wili: Plant materials are placed on a backing of ti leaf, lauhala, dried banana fiber or other suitable natural material and wound with fiber or thread (also yarn, dental floss, string or ribbon) around the plant material and backing.

Lei po'o is a head lei.

Lei Pāpale is a hat lei – a headband for a hat – 22-24 inches in length.

Lei Pāpahi is a lei pattern of alternating groups of flowers and foliage in a repetitive design. It can be applied to any of the different lei styles.