

History and Significance of the Lei in Hawaiian Culture

The lei, a garland or wreath often made of flowers, leaves, shells, seeds, nuts, or feathers, stands as a quintessential symbol of Hawaiian culture, encapsulating its rich Polynesian heritage and the islands' vibrant natural beauty. This cherished tradition, deeply woven into the fabric of Hawaiian society, transcends mere adornment to signify love, honor, celebration, and mourning, embodying the Aloha spirit that is central to Hawaiian identity. As it continues to flourish in contemporary Hawaiian society, the lei not only celebrates the islands' colorful history but also bridges cultures worldwide, making it a revered symbol of cultural connection and understanding.



The Origins of Lei Making in Hawaii

Lei-making in Hawaii is a tradition with deep Polynesian roots, tracing back to the early settlers who brought their lei-making practices to the Hawaiian Islands. These early Hawaiians crafted leis not only as part of their daily wear but also as a means of expressing their connection to nature and each other. Over time, the art of lei-making evolved, incorporating materials available on the islands and adapting to the changing Hawaiian landscape and society. This transformation reflects the broader cultural history of Hawaii, showcasing the adaptability and resilience of its people and their traditions.



The Cultural Significance of Lei in Hawaiian Society

In Hawaiian society, the lei is much more than a decorative garland; it is a powerful symbol of the Aloha spirit, embodying love, honor, respect, and the interconnectedness of life. Its significance is most palpable during life's significant milestones—births, graduations, weddings, and funerals—when leis are exchanged as tokens of deep emotional bonds and well-wishes. This tradition underscores the Hawaiian values of community, connection, and the perpetual cycle of life and death, marking the lei as an essential emblem of Hawaiian culture and symbolism.



Official Colors and Flowers of the Hawaiian Islands

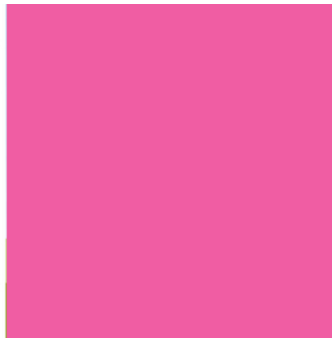
Hawaii (the Big Island) – Red – Lehua flower



First, The Big Island is red for the fire goddess Pele who lives there, lava is also red. The bright red flower growing in the tropical forests on Hawaii island is the Lehua. It is a bottlebrush-blossom. It shines fiery red on the leaves of the gnarled Ohia Tree. Hawaii is so poetic the names get entwined, the tree and the flower is the Ohia-Lehua tree.

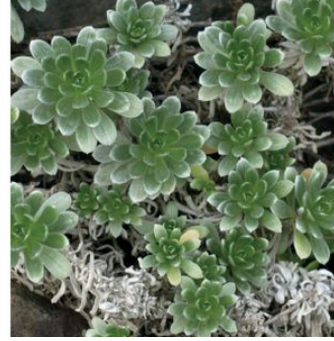
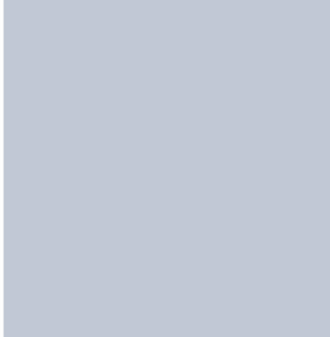
There's a legend where two lovers, Ohia, the man, and Lehua, the woman, were joined together, one was the tree and the lady, the flower. If you pick the Lehua flower, you separate her from Ohia and he cries- and his tears come down as rain. If you want it to rain pick the Lehua flower.

Maui – Pink – Lokelani rose



Next on the lei of islands is Maui, its color is pink. It's the pink color of the roses that bloom everywhere on the Valley Isle. "A rose by any other name would still be a rose", and as a matter of fact it does have another name, Lokelani (low-kay-lawn'-ee). That's Hawaiian for the Maui Rose. Boldly pink and fragrant is the Maui Rose.

Kahoolawe – Gray – Hinahina plant



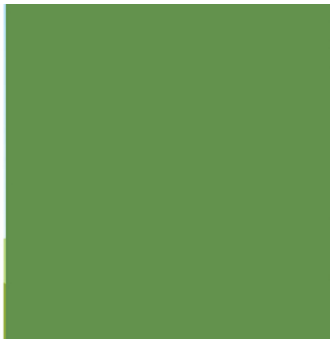
Offshore of Maui is the island of Kahoolawe, a lonely little island because no one can go there. Not a building or beach hut is there, but it is still a respectable little place. It proudly gives us the beautiful **Hinahina** (hee'-nah hee'-nah) **Plant**, trimmed with silver gray. Gray is the Kahoolawe's color.

Lanai – Orange – Kaunaoa plant



Another nearby island is Lanai, this island's color is orange, from the Kaunaoa (kah'-oo-nah-oh'-ah) plant. It grows on the ground shining orange, all along the beaches.

Molokai – Green – Kukui Nut flower



Number five on this lei string of islands is Friendly Isle, Molokai. Its color is green, the island flower is the white kukui nut flower, but it's color is still green. All the research turned up was that Molokai is rural, with rolling green fields, that must be it.

Oahu – Yellow – Ilima flower



Now for the Diamond Head, Waikiki, Hawaii 5-0 island of Oahu. With all its freeways of gray, and hotels of white, and cliffs of green, Oahu's color is yellow. It is from a golden yellow flower the Ilima. It is the symbol of love. It blooms brightest at the Urban Garden Center. It is the only flower that grows on the island of Oahu. Just kidding, but almost.

Kauai – Purple – Mokihana berry



Then comes Kauai, its color is purple, the color of the flowers on the fragrant Mokihana Tree. Berries on the tree have been used for centuries as perfume and air-fresheners. Ancient Hawaii. Yes, Hawaiian ladies used perfume way back when.

Ni'ihau – White – White Pupū shell



Last on the island string of the lei is the distant island of Ni'ihau (knee'-ee-how). The forbidden island that no one but Hawaiians can visit. It's a rebel in the color scheme, its color is not named for a flower but for the special white shells found there. Ni'ihau's color is white. The leis from the island, called Ni'ihau Shell Leis, sell for hundreds, even thousands of dollars each.