

## Melochia

*Melochia umbellata* (Houtt.) Stapf

Chocolate family (Sterculiaceae)

Post-Cook introduction

Introduced small weedlike tree of roadsides and waste places, to 50 ft (15 m) high and 6 inches (15 cm) in trunk diameter, with large ovate, long-pointed, finely sawtoothed, soft hairy leaves. Bark smooth, light gray. Twigs stout, light green, turning brown. Twigs, stipules, leaves, flowers, and fruits with soft gray hairs, partly star-shaped. Buds large, of stipules folded together, the 2 large half round stipules less than  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch (1 cm) long.

Leaves alternate, with long slender stalk  $2\frac{3}{4}$ –4 inches (7–10 cm) long. Blades broadly ovate, large, 5–6½ inches (13–16.5 cm) long and 5½ inches (14 cm) wide, abruptly long-pointed, heart-shaped at base, finely sawtoothed, thin, soft hairy, dull green above and gray green beneath.

Flower clusters (panicles) erect from base of upper leaves, large, 4–6 inches (10–15 cm) long, branched. Flowers many, few grouped at ends of short stalks, small, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (6 mm) long, five-parted, composed of bellshaped five-toothed greenish to brownish calyx, five elliptical usually pink petals, five stamens on a tube, and pistil with deeply five-angled ovary and five thread-like styles.

Fruit a small oblong capsule  $\frac{5}{16}$  inch (8 mm) long, gray or brown, deeply five-angled, five-celled, splitting open, with calyx and petals at base. Seeds two in each cell, small, brown, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (6 mm) long, including long wing.

The sapwood is white and heartwood pale brown. A low-density hardwood (sp. gr. 0.5) with moderately large shrinkage in drying, appears to have potential for use as a utility furniture species such as for drawer sides and backs. It has an attractive figure imparted by zones of darker color in the growth rings.

A weedy tree, reported as planted elsewhere for shade, because of its rapid growth. It is a honey plant and forms thickets in clearings and forest borders.

Introduced about 1925, has been planted extensively on Hawaii and sparingly on Kauai and Oahu. It was one of the species included in aerial seeding of a burn on the Panaewa and lower Waiakea Forest Reserves near Hilo in 1928, which resulted in a large population there. Trees may be seen commonly along the volcano road near the

turnoff to Kulani, along the Stainback Highway, and near Hilo Airport.

### **Special area**

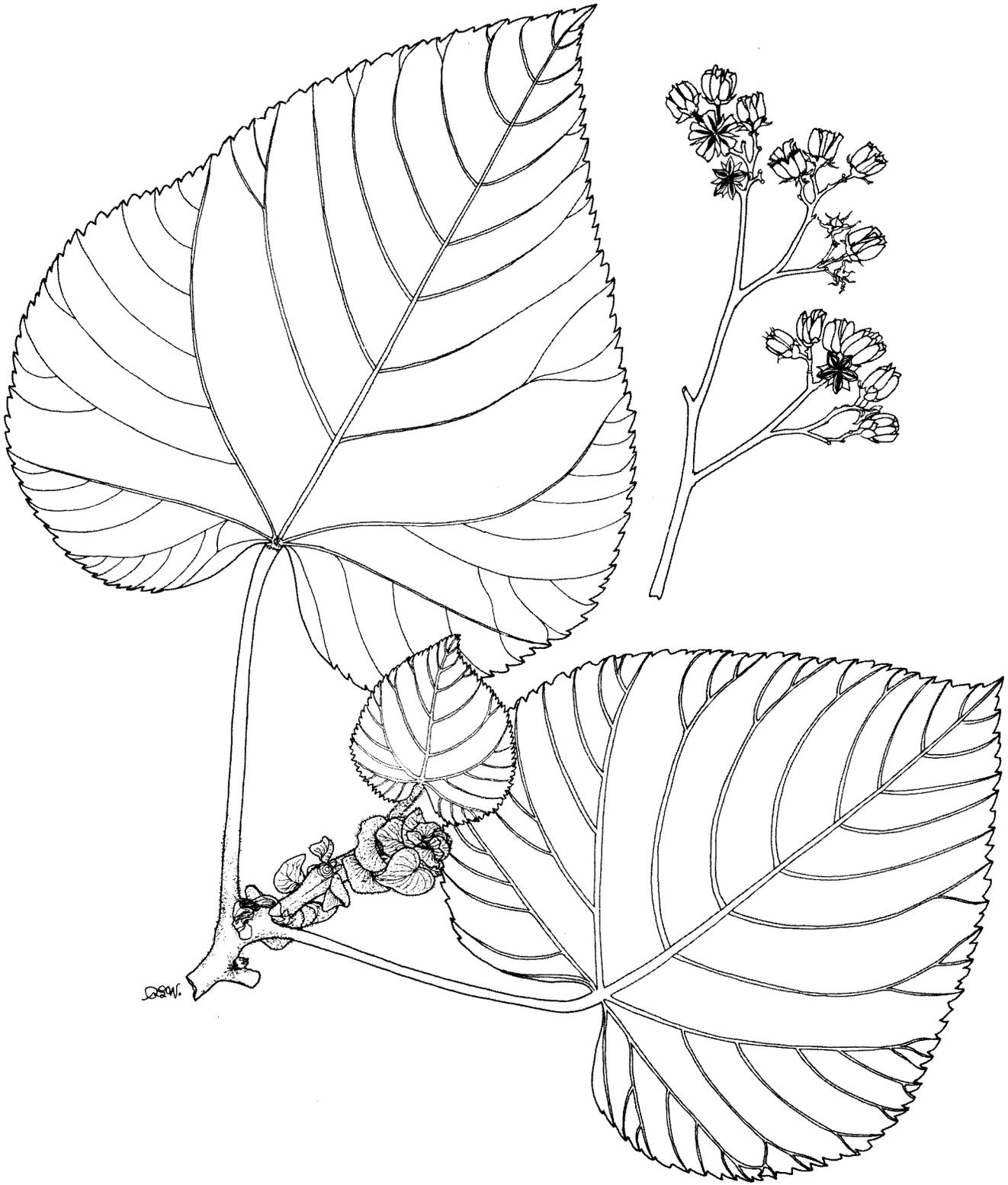
Waiakea

### **Range**

Native from India to New Guinea and Philippines. Introduced beyond in southern Asia and Pacific Islands.

### **Botanical synonym**

*Melochia indica* (Gmel.) Kurz.



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Leafy twig and fruits (upper right),  $\frac{2}{3}$  X.