

Kahili-flower

Grevillea banksii R. Br.

Protea family (Proteaceae)

Post-Cook introduction

Small introduced ornamental tree, partly deciduous, with pinnate leaves of 3–11 very narrow leaflets, and showy dark red flowers. To 20 ft (6 m) tall, with short trunk to 1 ft (0.3 m) in diameter, and irregular branching crown. Outer bark dark brown, inner bark reddish, fibrous, bitter. Twig, stout, covered with whitish pressed hairs.

Leaves alternate, pinnate, 4–8 inches (10–20 cm) long, with slightly winged axis and deeply divided into 3–11 very narrow stalkless leaflets or segments 2½–4 inches (6–10 cm) long and ⅛–¼ inch (3–6 mm) wide, ending in tiny sharp point, thick and leathery, rolled under at edges, above shiny green and becoming nearly hairless, beneath with dense mat of pressed whitish hairs.

Flower clusters (racemes) terminal and lateral, 2–4 inches (5–10 cm) long, with straight stout hairy persistent axis. Flowers many, paired, short-stalked, showy, irregular, composed of finely hairy red calyx about ¾ inch (2 cm) long including narrow tube split on one side and four curved narrow lobes, hairy on outside, no corolla, four stalkless stamens inserted near ends of lobes, and pistil with hairy ovary, slender threadlike curved style to 1½ inches (4 cm) long, and enlarged yellow stigma.

Fruit podlike (follicle), about ⅝ inch (15 mm) long, flattened, gray hairy, splitting open on one edge, with long curved persistent style. Seeds two, about ⅔ inch (1 cm) long, elliptical, flat, blackish, bordered by narrow brown wing.

Wood light brown, hard, with large prominent rays that produce an oak-like figure. The wood resembles that of silk-oak (*G. robusta*), but has not been used in Hawaii because the trees are small.

It is reported that some persons develop a skin rash from stiff hairs on the flower cluster when handling the plant. In Australia, it is toxic to horses.

This tree is planted as an ornamental in Hawaii for its showy flowers. It may be seen as an escape growing along the roadsides near Anahola, Kauai. There is no record of this tree having been planted in the forest reserves by the Division of Forestry. A form with creamy white flowers is known from Upper Manoa Valley, Honolulu. It is a mutant of unknown origin.

Range

Native of Australia.

Other common names

ha'ikū, 'okapua, 'ula'ula, Banks grevillea, silk-oak.

Botanical synonym

Stylurus banksii (R. Br.) Deg.

The Hawaiian name ha'ikū is from Haiku, Maui, where the species was first introduced. The scientific name honors Joseph Banks (1743–1820), British botanist and patron of sciences.



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Flowering twig, 1/2 X; flowers (upper left), fruit (lower left), and seeds (lower right), 1 X (Degener).