

Blue mahoe, Cuban-bast

Hibiscus elatus Sw.

Mallow family (Malvaceae)

Post-Cook introduction

Mahoe is an introduced forest and shade tree related to hau, *Hibiscus tiliaceus*, (and sometimes considered a variety) but is a taller tree with larger flowers 3–5 inches (7.5–13 cm) long and broad, also funnelshaped and yellow, and with blunt pointed egg-shaped seed capsules, densely hairy with hairy seeds.

Large evergreen introduced tree to 80 ft (24 m) high with tall straight trunk 16 inches (0.4 m) in diameter or larger. Bark gray, smooth to finely fissured. Inner bark fibrous, whitish to whitish green, and slightly bitter. Twigs stout, green when young, with rings at nodes. Young twigs, leafstalks, lower leaf surfaces, calyx, and seed capsules densely covered with minute gray star-shaped hairs.

Leaves alternate with slender round leafstalks 2½–4 inches (6–10 cm) long and with two large oblong short-pointed hairy light green basal scales (stipules) 1¼ inches (3 cm) long, shedding early and leaving ring scar. Blades heart-shaped and nearly round, about 5–7 inches (13–18 cm) long and broad, abruptly short or long-pointed at apex and heart-shaped or notched at base, with straight or finely wavy edges, with mostly nine main veins from base, slightly thickened, upper surface green and hairless, lower surface gray hairy with 1–3 narrow glands near base of main veins.

Flowers 1–3 borne at leaf bases at ends of twigs on stout green stalks of ½ inch (13 mm), with light green hairy basal cup (involucre) ¾ inch (2 cm) long with nine long-pointed lobes. Calyx 1½–2 inches (4–5 cm), light green hairy, tubular with five narrow long-pointed spreading lobes. Petals five, yellow with large dark red spot at base inside, 3½–5 inches (9–13 cm) long, narrow elliptical spreading, united at base. Stamens numerous on whitish column united with corolla at base. Pistil has densely hairy five-celled ovary, long style, and five rounded stigmas. Flowers opening and closing same day, petals withering and turning to orange and red.

Seed capsules egg-shaped, 1–1½ inches (2.5–4 cm) long, blunt-pointed, densely yellow brown hairy, splitting into five parts, calyx and involucre shedding. Seeds many, hairy.

Sapwood light brown, heartwood bluish, greenish, or streaked when freshly cut. Wood varies from soft, fine-textured, with silky luster to hard, of medium to coarse texture, and rather dull. Where this species is native, the attractive colored wood has been prized for cabinetwork, furniture, interior trim, and gunstocks. Other uses include construction, railroad cross-ties, and shingles.

The fibrous bark of young trees makes good ropes. Formerly, the lacelike inner bark was used for tying bundles of Havana cigars and was called Cuba bark. An infusion of the mucilaginous leaves and young twigs has served in home remedies.

This species is being tested in Puerto Rico in experimental forest plantations. It grows rapidly, reaching a height of 60 ft (18 m) in 10 years. A red-flowered form is known there.

Planted as a fast growing handsome shade tree in southern Florida, because of its resistance to salt spray.

Introduced in Hawaii about the middle of the present century as a forest and shade tree in moist lowland zones.

Special areas

Waimea Arboretum, Tantalus, Waiakea

Champion

Height 82 ft (25.0 m), c.b.h. 8.4 ft (2.6 m), spread 61 ft 918.6 m). Lihue Sugar Co., Lihue, Kauai (1968).

Range

Native only in upland parts of Cuba and Jamaica

The common name mahoe is from the Spanish, majagua. Blue refers to the staining common to the wood of this tree.

Other common names

majo, emajagua excelsa (Puerto Rico); majagua, majagua azul (Cuba); blue mahoe (Jamaica)

Botanical synonyms

Paritium elatum (Sw.) G. Don, *Pariti tiliaceum* var. *elatum* (Sw.) Deg. & Greenwell



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Flowering twig, fruits (right), $\frac{2}{3}$ X (P.R. v. 2).