

## Kāwa‘u, Hawaiian holly

*Ilex anomala* Hook. & Arn.

Holly family (Aquifoliaceae)

Native species (endemic)

Hawaii has one native tree species related to American holly of eastern continental United States, which is in the same genus. This handsome evergreen tree has elliptical leathery leaves, many small white flowers, and clusters of small rounded black fruits.

A medium-sized tree to 30 ft (9 m) high and 1 ft (0.3 m) in trunk diameter, often a small shrub, with irregular crown, hairless throughout. Bark light to dark gray, smooth. Inner bark with outer green layer, light yellow with brown streaks, bitter. Twigs stout, slightly angled, light green, with raised half-round leaf-scars. End buds more than 1/8 inch (3 mm) long, composed of pointed scales which form a ring around twig to mark end of season's growth.

Leaves alternate but partly crowded, with light green leafstalks 1/4–3/4 inch (6–20 mm) long, flattened above. Blades elliptical, mostly 1 1/2–3 1/2 inches (4–9 cm) long and 1–2 1/2 inches (2.5–6 cm) wide, thick, stiff, brittle, and leathery, rounded or blunt at both ends, turned under at edges (rarely with teeth, except on seedlings), above shiny dark green with network of fine veins slightly sunken, beneath dull light green with inconspicuous veins.

Flower clusters (cymose panicles) 1–3 inches (2.5–7.5 cm) long at leaf bases, the long stalk and branches flattened. Flowers many, short-stalked, from rounded greenish buds, male and female on different plants (dioecious), about 1/2 inch (13 mm) broad. Calyx less than 1/8 inch (3 mm) long, greenish, with 4–5 rounded lobes; corolla white, sometimes pink-tinged, composed of short tube and 6–12 widely spreading rounded lobes 1/8 inch (3 mm) long; stamens as many as corolla lobes, attached in notches, white, in female flowers short and not functioning; and pistil with rounded yellow green 12–20-celled ovary, no styles, and as many crowded short stigmas as cells, in male flowers small and not functioning.

Fruits (drupes) common on twigs back of leaves, rounded but slightly flattened, about 5/16–3/8 inch (8–10 mm) in diameter, shiny black, smooth, with calyx and stigmas remaining, bitter. Nutlets 10–20, 1/8 inch (3 mm) long.

Wood whitish, or grayish yellow with lighter colored sapwood, hard. It was prized by the Hawaiians for canoe trimmings and to make the anvil on which bark was beaten into bark cloth or tapa. It has also been used for saddle trees.

Common and widespread in open wet forests through the six larger islands, to 6500 ft (1981 m) altitude.

### **Special areas**

Kokee, Haleakala, Volcanoes

### **Champion**

Height 45 ft (13.7 m), c.b.h. 3.9 ft (1.2 m), spread 32 ft (9.8 m). Honaunau Forest Reserve, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii (1968).

### **Range**

Hawaiian Islands only

### **Other common names**

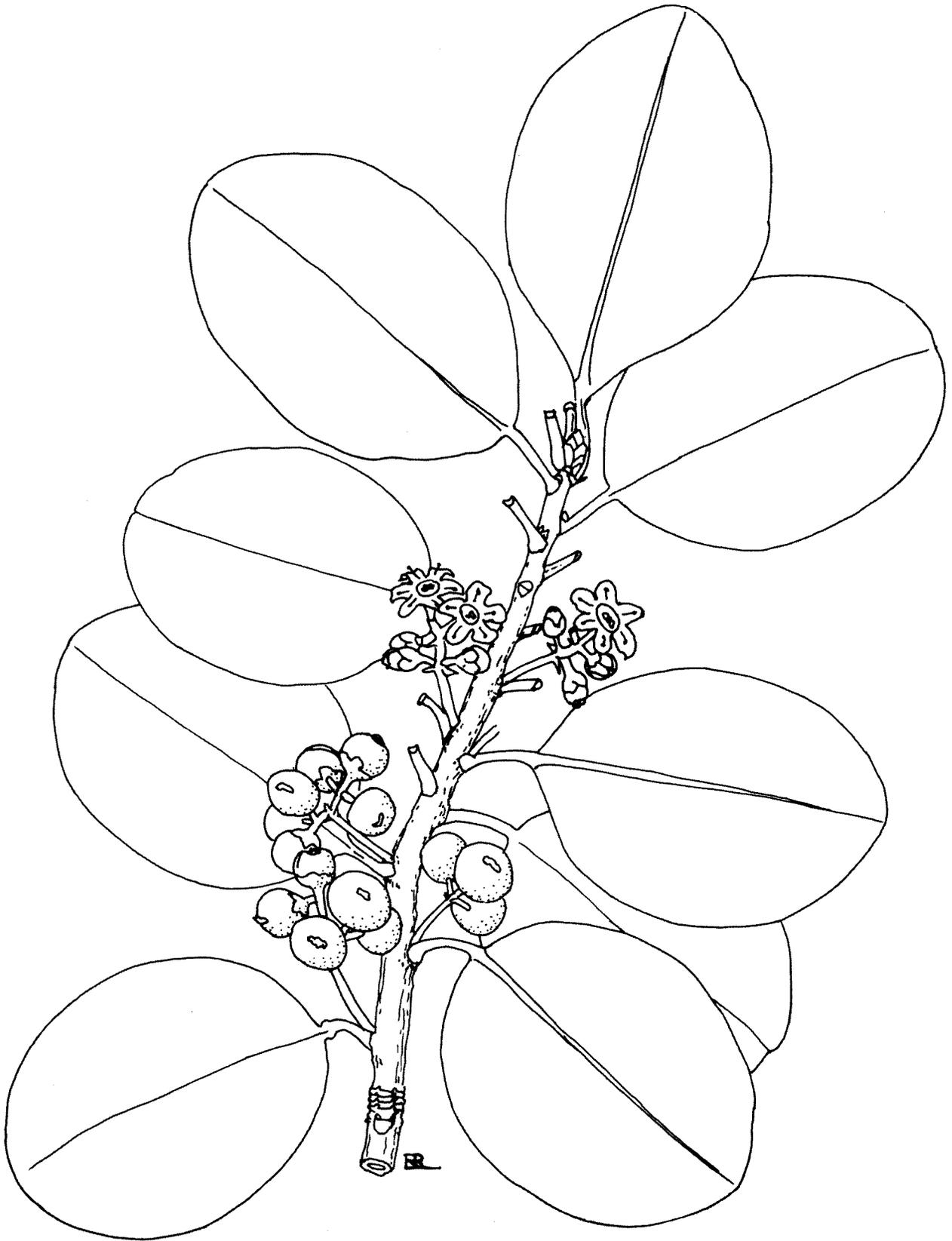
kā'awa'u, 'aiea

The name kāwa'u has been applied occasionally to *Styphelia*, *Mezoneuron*, and *Zanthoxylum* also.

### **Botanical synonyms**

*Ilex sandwicensis* (Endl.) Loess., *I. hawaiiensis* S. Y. Hu.

This very variable species and a few close relatives in Polynesia are classed as the most primitive for the genus of more than 350 species of wide, mostly tropical distribution. The Marquesan and Tahitian trees are scarcely distinguishable from those of Hawaii.



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Twig with flowers and fruits, 1 X.