

Kōlea

Myrsine lessertiana A. DC.

Myrsine family (Myrsinaceae)

Native species (endemic)

Two common and widely distributed species (*M. lessertiana* and *M. sandwicensis*) will serve as examples of the genus *Myrsine*, of small to medium-sized native evergreen trees in which as many as 20 Hawaiian species have been distinguished. In this genus the leaves generally are many, crowded, narrowly elliptical or lance-shaped and broadest beyond middle, tapering to base and short leafstalk, with gland-dots visible under a hand lens; many small short-stalked greenish five-parted flowers crowded along twig back of leaves; and many small round, blackish single-seeded fruits (berries).

This species characterized by larger leaves than others is a small or medium-sized tree to 60 ft (18 m) tall and 1–2 ft (0.3–0.6 m) in trunk diameter. Bark light gray, smooth to finely fissured, thick. Inner bark with brown outer layer, pink or red with brown streaks, bitter. Twigs mostly stout, hairless, green when young, turning gray and becoming warty, with raised half-round leaf-scars, ending in narrow pointed bud of young leaves.

Leaves many, alternate but crowded, hairless, narrowly elliptical, 3¼–5½ inches (8–14 cm) long and 1–1½ inches (2.5–4 cm) wide, slightly thick and leathery or slightly fleshy, apex blunt to rounded or pointed, base short- to long-pointed, pink when young, tapering at base to short winged greenish or pinkish leafstalk of ¼ inch (6 mm) or almost stalkless, upper surface slightly shiny green with inconspicuous veins, lower surface dull light green with many blackish gland-dots visible under a lens.

Flowers many, small, about ⅛ inch (3 mm) long and broad, in groups of 3–7 on short slender stalks of ¼ inch (6 mm) along twigs and short spurs back of leaves and at base of oldest leaves. Calyx light green, of five pointed lobes; corolla of five elliptical lobes yellowish with red dots; five short stalkless stamens attached on corolla and opposite lobes; and pistil with conical ovary and almost stalkless stigma.

Fruits (berries) round or elliptical, about ¼ inch (6 mm) in diameter, turning from green to reddish or black, with calyx at base and pointed stigma at apex. Seed single, round.

The wood is pinkish yellow with prominent reddish brown rays providing a prominent figure on all surfaces. It is moderately hard, easily worked and polished, and suitable for cabinetwork but not used at present. Used by the Hawaiians as timber for houses and anvils on which to beat tapa. A black dye for tapa was made from the charcoal.

This very variable species is widespread through the islands, especially in wet forests and open areas at 700–4000 ft (213–1219 m) altitude.

Special areas

Haleakala, Volcanoes, Kipuka Puauulu

Champion

Height 67 ft (20.4 m), c.b.h. 6.8 ft (20.7 m), spread 25 ft (7.6 m). Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii (1968).

Range

Kauai, Oahu, Molokai, Lanai, Maui, and Hawaii only

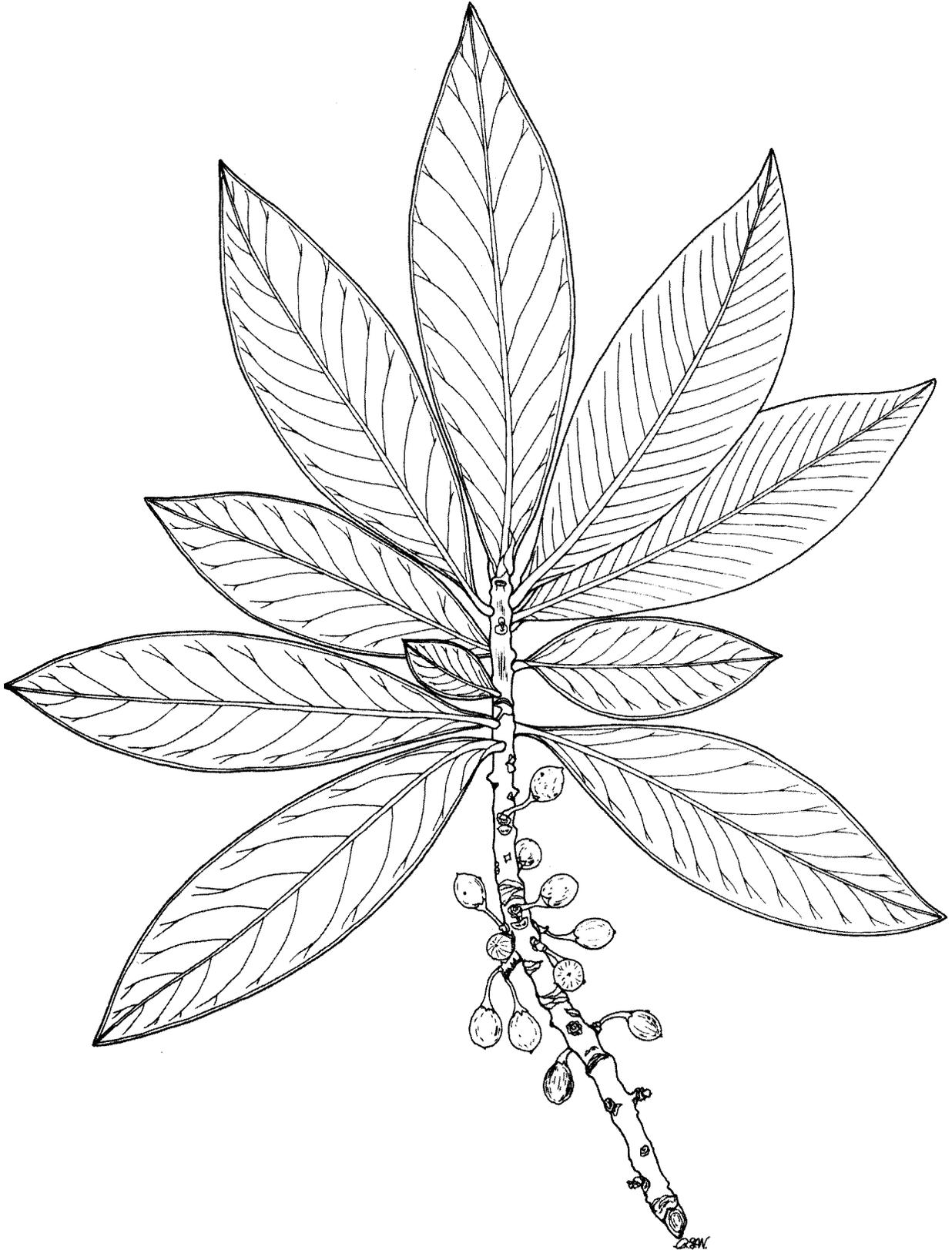
Other common name

kōlea lau nui (meaning large-leaf kōlea)

Botanical synonyms

Myrsine meziana (Levl.) Wilbur, *Suttonia lessertiana* (A. DC.) Mez, *Rapanea lessertiana* (A. DC.) Deg. & Hosaka

Rock noted that this species is one of the most variable in the genus and that two trees are hardly alike. He reported that red sap exudes from cut trunks and formerly served for dyeing tapa or bark cloth.



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Myrsine lessertiana A. DC.
Twig with fruits, $\frac{2}{3}$ X.