

Pāpala kēpau

Pisonia brunoniana Endl.

Four-o'clock family (Nyctaginaceae)

Native species (endemic)

Small native evergreen tree of dry forests, with paired elliptical leaves, very large open flower clusters with many small flowers on long slender widely forking stalks, and narrow sticky fruits. To about 18 ft (5.5 m) and 4 inches (110 cm) in trunk diameter. Bark light gray or light brown, smoothish; inner bark whitish, slightly bitter. Twigs green to brown. Young twigs and leaves with tiny pressed brown hairs.

Leaves opposite, with leafstalks of $\frac{1}{2}$ –1 inch (13–25 mm). Blades elliptical or oblong, $2\frac{1}{2}$ – $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches (6–14 cm) long and $1\frac{1}{4}$ – $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches (3–8 cm) wide, blunt at apex, short-pointed at base, not toothed on edges, thin, hairless, shiny green above, dull light green beneath.

Flower clusters (panicles) terminal, very large and open or loose, 6–12 inches (15–30 cm) long and broad. Flowers many, small, on many long slender widely forking stalks, $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (10 mm) long, composed of greenish tubular or narrowly funnel-shaped finely hairy calyx with five short, pinkish lobes, 8–12 stamens attached inside tube and extending beyond, and pistil with narrow ovary, long style, and dot stigma.

Fruit (anthocarp) narrowly cylindrical, consisting of enlarged calyx $\frac{3}{4}$ – $1\frac{3}{8}$ inches (20–35 mm) long and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch (3 mm) in diameter, widest at middle, spreading at apex, five-ridged, sticky and exuding glue, enclosing the narrow one-seeded fruit (achene) with style at apex.

Wood whitish yellow, very lightweight, very soft, and brittle. It “honeycombs” in air drying and is not used.

Widespread in dry forests and at edges of lava fields, mostly at 2000–4000 ft (610–1219 m) altitude.

Special areas

Wahiawa, Volcanoes

Champion

Height 50 ft (15.2 m), c.b.h. 6.3 ft (1.9 m), spread 31 ft (9.4 m). Hoomau Ranch, Honomalino, Hawaii (1968).

Range

Oahu, Lanai, Maui, Hawaii only

Botanical synonyms

Heimerliodendron brunoianum (Endl.) Skotts., *Pisonia inermis* G. Forst., not Jacq.

The Hawaiian common name pāpala kēpau is from kepau, the name for tar, pitch, etc. A sticky liquid or glue exudes from the fruits and catches insects. Hawaiians formerly used the viscous fruits as birdlime to catch small birds.



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Twig with flowers, fruits (lower right), 1 X (Maiden).