

Halapepe, golden dracaena

Pleomele aurea (Mann) N. E. Br.

Agave family (Agavaceae)

Native species (endemic)

Halapepe (genus *Pleomele* or *Dracaena*) is a distinctive small evergreen tree resembling the related mainland genus of *Yucca*, with trunk and very few stout nearly erect branches, ending in a cluster of many crowded large sword-shaped or strap-shaped leaves, not forming a compact crown. Plants are scattered in dry areas on middle slopes of the six large Hawaiian Islands.

In the broad sense, halapepe is described here as a variable species under its oldest scientific name, *Pleomele aurea* (Mann) N. E. Br., *sens. lat.* Altogether, 9 species have been named from the Hawaiian Islands, each limited to one or two of the six large islands (St. John 1985). The segregates are separated mainly by differences in measurements of flowers and flower parts and of leaves.

Height about 15–25 ft (4.6–7.6 m), sometimes to 40 ft (12 m). The straight trunk 1–3 ft (0.3–0.9 m) in diameter, light gray, smooth, slightly scaly or fissured, not divided into bark and wood. The outer dead part reddish brown and inner part whitish or light yellow with reddish streaks, fibrous, and almost tasteless or slightly bitter. Smallest branches about $\frac{3}{4}$ –1 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (2–3 cm) in diameter, light gray, smooth with many crowded nearly horizontal lines or ridges of leaf scars, forming irregular rings.

Leaves sword-shaped or strap-shaped, spreading and drooping, 8–20 inches (20–51 cm) long and $\frac{3}{8}$ –1 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (1–3 cm) wide, with expanded whitish slightly clasping base, curved, leathery, hairless, ending in long blunt point, slightly shiny green on both surfaces, without midvein, not toothed on edges.

Flower clusters (panicles) large, massive, about 2 ft (60 cm) long at end of leafy branch, curved downward, with stout persistent woody axis, much branched, with leaflike scales. Flowers many, crowded, 1–3 together on slender stalk, narrowly bell-shaped, golden yellow or varying from greenish yellow to orange, about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ –2 inches (4–5 cm) long, persistent, composed of narrow tube 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (4 cm) long and $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (1 cm) wide, six narrow spreading lobes $\frac{5}{8}$ inch (1.5 cm) long, six slender stamens attached near base of lobes and about the same length, and pistil inside enlarged base of tube, com-

posed of rounded greenish ovary, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (6 mm) long, slender long style, and slightly 3-lobed stigma. Flowering in early spring or, in moist areas, summer.

Berries many on curved stalks, round or slightly 2–3-lobed, $\frac{3}{8}$ – $\frac{5}{8}$ inch (1–1.5 cm) in diameter, bright red, dark brown when dry. Seeds mostly single, sometimes two or three, elliptical or rounded or slightly angled, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (6 mm) long, whitish or light brown.

The inner portion of trunk corresponding to wood is whitish or light yellow mottled with reddish streaks, finetextured, extremely soft and easily cut. Hawaiians formerly carved religious statues from the soft trunks. The branches served for decorating their altars, including that of Laka, the goddess of hula.

Halapepe is common in dry areas, especially the aa (rough) lava fields through the Hawaiian Islands, usually at 600–2000 ft (183–610 m) altitude. Cultivation of this attractive plant should be encouraged.

Special areas

Kokee, Waimea Arboretum, Wahiawa, Bishop Museum

Champion

Height 20 ft (6.1 m), c. b. h. 3.5 ft (1.1 m), spread 14 ft (4.3 m). Kaupulehu, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii (1968).

Range

Native only in Hawaiian Islands.

This genus is placed here in the Agave family (Agavaceae), along with related genera of similar habit, such as *Cordylina*, *Yucca*, and *Agave*.

The common name halapepe, meaning baby hala, refers to the resemblance to the larger plant, hala or screwpine, *Pandanus tectorius* Parkins.

Botanical synonym

Dracaena aurea Mann

The segregate species with distribution by islands are: *Pleomele auwahiensis* St. John (*P. rockii* St. John), Molokai and Maui; *P. fernaldii* St. John, Lanai; *P. forbesii* Deg., Oahu; *P. halapepe* St. John, Oahu; *P. hawaiiensis* Deg. & I. Deg. (*P. kaupulehuensis* St. John, *P. konaensis* St. John), Hawaii. The drawing here is that of the segregate *P. halapepe* (Degener).



Halapepe, golden dracaena

Pleomele aurea (Mann) N. E. Br.

Twig with fruits, $\frac{1}{8}$ X; flowers and seeds (below), 1 X (Degener).