

Pūkiawe

Styphelia tameiameiae (Cham. & Schlecht.) F. Muell.

Epacris family (Epacridaceae)

Native species (indigenous)

Pūkiawe is a large evergreen shrub or sometimes small tree when in understory of wet forests. Common through the islands from low to high altitudes. Recognized by the small needlelike leaves whitish beneath, very small whitish flowers, and small round red, white, or pink fruits.

A shrub of 3–10 ft (0.9–3 m), and in forests a small tree to 15 ft (4.6 m) high with twisted trunk to 5 inches (13 cm) in diameter, with many spreading irregular slender branches. Bark gray, finely fissured, becoming scaly and shaggy; inner bark thin, greenish, fibrous and slightly bitter. Twigs very slender and wiry, finely hairy, pinkish when young, becoming brown, with tiny rounded raised leaf scars.

Leaves many, alternate, scattered and spreading along twig on tiny hairy yellowish leafstalks. Blades bent at right angle to twig, very narrow (linear to oblong), $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (6–13 mm) long and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch (3 mm) or less in width, sharp-pointed, rounded at base, turned under at edges, slightly thickened and stiff, hairless, upper surface dull green without visible veins, lower surface whitish, with many long fine nearly parallel veins.

Flowers few, single and almost stalkless at leaf bases, bell-shaped, $\frac{1}{8}$ inch (3 mm) long and wide, composed of several overlapping scales at base; calyx with five overlapping hairy sepals green and pinkish tinged; white bell-shaped tubular corolla with five spreading narrow pointed lobes; five tiny stamens in notches of corolla; and pistil with rounded ovary, short style, and dot stigma.

Fruits (berries) several at leaf bases, round, $\frac{3}{16}$ – $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (5–6 mm) in diameter, red, pink, or white, slightly shiny, with calyx at base and style at apex, slightly fleshy, mealy, tasteless or slightly astringent, becoming brown and dry. Seed or stone single, elliptical, brown, more than $\frac{1}{8}$ inch (3 mm) long.

Sapwood is light reddish brown and heartwood dark reddish brown. A fine-textured heavy wood of moderate hardness.

The wood was used for cremating bodies of outlaws. Also, according to Hawaiian historian David Malo,

when a high ranking chief wanted to mingle with commoners, he would enter a smoke house and be smudged with smoke of pūkiawe wood while a priest chanted a prayer for dispensation.

The bright beadlike fruits served in Hawaiian garlands or leis.

Common and widespread from understory of wet forests to border of dry forest and exposed ridges and waste places, from near sea level to 10,600 ft (3231 m) or above. Of largest size in forests at 5000–6000 ft (1524–1829 m) and almost creeping in bogs. It is very common in Hawaii Volcanoes and Haleakala National Parks. In pastures and rangelands at higher altitudes classed as a weed of no forage value (Hasselwood and Motter 1966).

Special areas

Kokee, Haleakala, Volcanoes

Range

Through the six large Hawaiian Islands and in Marquesas Islands

Other common names

maiele, kāwa‘u, ‘a‘ali‘i-mahu, kawai, Kamehameha styphelia, Hawaiian heather, kānehoa, pūpūkiawe, puakiawe

Botanical synonym

Styphelia douglasii (Gray) Skottsb.

The scientific name honors King Kamehameha I (1758–1819), who united the Hawaiian Islands into one kingdom. The spelling shows the difficulty in transcribing the spoken letters k and t, which were almost interchangeable before the language was written.



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Twig with fruits (above), twig with flowers (below, 1 X).