



Expanding Tree Diversity in Hawai'i's Landscapes: Hao, *Rauvolfia sandwicensis*

Richard A. Criley
Department of Tropical Plant and Soil Sciences

This Hawaiian native tree is scarce in the nursery trade, but it is well worth seeking for its shiny dark-green foliage and tight, rounded crown. It is touted as being drought tolerant and is recommended for low water-use landscapes. It grows moderately quickly to a maximum of about 30 ft in height by 15–20 ft wide, or it can be maintained as a shrub. Occasional specimens of 60 ft high by 60 ft wide have been found.

Recommended Use in Landscapes

- Small tree for a residence
- Shade tree
- Accent tree
- Median strip



Shrub form of hao (*Rauvolfia sandwicensis*)

Distribution

- Found in dryland to mesic forests on the major islands of Hawai'i and even on old lava fields

Propagation Techniques

- Primarily from seed

Cultural Requirements and Tolerances

- Minimal water requirement once established
- Somewhat salt tolerant
- Less wind tolerant
- Tolerates most soils



Hao (*Rauvolfia sandwicensis*) as a small tree

Flower and Fruit Characteristics

- Tiny white plumeria-shaped flowers about 1/8 inch across borne in terminal clusters
- Fruits are heart-shaped drupes about 3/8 to 5/8 inch, purplish at maturity, and each lobe contains a flattened seed.

Leaf Characteristics

- Smooth, narrowly elliptic in shape, and 2½ to 6 inches long.
- Borne in whorls of 3 to 5 leaves.

Advantages for Use in Landscapes

- Easy to maintain
- Attractive whitish bark
- No HWRA rating

Disadvantages for Use in Landscapes

- Milky sap when branches are broken
- Susceptible to scale and sooty mold
- Purple fruits stain pavement



Foliage of hao (*Rauvolfia sandwicensis*)



Flowers of hao (*Rauvolfia sandwicensis*)