



Ohia Lehua

Metrosideros polymorpha Gaud.
(synonym *M. collina* (Forst.) Gray
subsp. *polymorpha* (Gaud.) Rock

Common names: ohia lehua, ohia,
lehua

Native habitat: Hawaii; all main is-
lands except Kahoolawe and Niihau



Characteristics

Ohia lehua is typically a large, slow-growing, evergreen shrub or tree 30–80 ft high. Its forms are extremely variable, ranging from creeping or erect shrubs to spreading or tall trees. Dozens of forms have been recognized based primarily on growth habit, leaf characteristics, and flower color. Its bark is light gray and smooth, becoming rough and scaly with age. Its medium-textured leaves may be up to 3 inches long and vary among growth forms from round to narrow and blunt to pointed, with smooth to woolly undersurfaces. New leaf growth is often pink or reddish. The showy flowers are usually red with numerous stamens 0.5–1 inch long forming tufts at the branch ends. The flowers are produced periodically throughout the year. Forms with flowers that are red-orange, orange, pink, white, or yellow are propagated.

Location

Ohia is found in a wide range of habitats. It grows best in cool uplands but also does well at sea level. It has good wind tolerance but poor tolerance of salt, although selected forms may be salt tolerant. It is tolerant of volcanic fumes.

Landscape uses

Ohia may be used as a single specimen plant or as a background, windbreak, or hedge plant. It is useful as a shade or street tree. Many forms are available, varying in size and flower color, but few selections have been named. Forms also include weeping and variegated types. Ohia is the official flower of the island of Hawaii.

Culture

Plant ohia in full sun or partial shade in a rich, well drained soil. Provide regular irrigation. Train while young to develop form. Young growth is susceptible to Chinese rose beetles.

Propagation

Seeds germinate readily and grow rapidly but will not produce seedlings that are true to type. To obtain desired flower color, ohia may be started from cuttings or air-layered, but success with these methods has been inconsistent from plant to plant.

Other uses

The very hard, dark red wood is useful for construction, flooring, and furniture. Ohia has been used in Hawaiian culture for statuary, spears, and mallets. The flowers are considered sacred to the goddess Pele and are popular for leis.

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