



## Ilima



shrub type



groundcover type

### *Sida fallax* Walp.

Native habitat: Pacific Islands, China, indigenous from sea level to 2000 ft elevation on all Hawaiian islands.

### Characteristics

Ilima is a shrub with many forms, making it very difficult to discuss as “one” plant. Ilima grows from 6 inches to 4 ft tall, and sometimes to 10 ft tall. The growth habit varies from prostrate to erect. Many ecological types and forms of this plant are found in the wild and offered for landscapes. Beach forms are low-growing, forming mats, but can be erect, spreading shrubs. Upland types are erectly growing shrubs; some can be tree-like.

Lowland forms have pubescent, silver-green foliage, while mountain forms have smooth, green foliage. Leaves are ½–4 inches long and narrow to rounded or heart-shaped. Leaf margins are finely to coarsely serrated (toothed). Leaf texture is fine to medium.

Ilima’s attractive flowers occur solitary or in small clusters. They are usually yellow to yellow-orange, but rich orange to dull red forms are known. The flowers are about 1 inch in diameter and have five petals.

### Landscape uses

Landscape use varies with type and form. Ilima flowers are effective in landscapes. Beach types make excellent groundcovers for hot, dry locations and are suitable for xeriscapes. Larger-growing and upland types make good garden or border shrubs. Different forms vary in salt and drought tolerance and soil requirements. Beach types are more tolerant of dry locations, soil salinity, and salt spray. All types prefer full sun.

Cultivated ilimas typically have been selected for bright flowers and good growth habit. The habit, form,

height, flowering, and attractiveness of the plants vary, depending upon where the original seeds or propagation stock were collected. Because ilimas are so variable, care should be taken to select the correct type to meet specific needs.

### Culture

Ilima grows well in cultivation without special care. Fertilizer applications increase growth. Chlorotic or yellow spots on the foliage may disappear with applications of micronutrients. Upland types require more irrigation than beach types. Ilima is relatively pest-free. Upland forms appear susceptible to nematodes, while beach types are apparently resistant.

### Propagation

Seeds germinate easily and seedlings grow quickly. The plant can also be started from cuttings, but rooting percentages are somewhat low.

### Additional notes

The extreme diversity in the species offers numerous possibilities for selecting and naming cultivars. Some of the forms that may be found in Hawaii include:

*Ilima-lei*—large-growing, upland type selected for excellent yellow flowers.

*Ilima-ku-kula*—tall, upland form with irregular flowers.

*Ilima-ku-kahakai (ilima papa)*—low-growing, common beach form that makes a good groundcover.

*Ilima-koli-kukui*—reddish brown flowers.

The yellow-flowered form is the flower of Oahu and is widely planted. Some forms are used medicinally.

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