

Caring for your 'Ala 'ala wai nui



'Ala'ala wai nui (*Coleus australis*), is a natural part of ecosystems in Hawai'i, Polynesia, and Australia. This plant resembles the mint used to make tea or added to flavor meals (*Mentha* species) and is in the mint family (Lamiaceae) – but it does not have the smell or taste. There are about 60 other species of native Hawaiian mints, in the genera *Phyllostegia* (kāpane), *Stenogyne* (mā 'ohi 'ohi), and *Haplostachys* (honohono). They evolved from a separate colonization event - none have the typical mint taste.

'Ala'ala wai nui are excellent beginner plants; there are few requirements to keep them alive and the abundant flowers will brighten up your lanai or garden.

When grown in partial sun or full shade the plants will be lush green; when grown in full sun the plants will survive but the leaves will be pale green and smaller.

They can be kept in pots, or, you can place stems in the cracks of rock walls. The roots do not need much soil. Rock walls that are regularly rained on/watered are ideal. These plants do not do as well in full soil, especially if it is not well-drained. Whether in a pot or in between rocks, the plants grow quickly and produce white to violet colored flower spikes after a month. If you cut the old flowers, the plant will produce more.

Pests are generally not an issue. The plants live one to two years. The seeds will disperse across your garden or into the pots on your lanai and sprout up in places that are frequently wet, but they are not weedy. In drier areas, the seeds will sprout when it rains. You can also take cuttings from older plants and re-plant them by simply sticking them in a pot of soil or in a rock wall; they easily produce new roots.

Enjoy!

