

## Mālama Maui – Floriculture

Thousands and thousands of flower lei to greet visitors with aloha and that residents give birthdays, graduation days, Tuesdays, any days. Gravity-defying floral arrangements that grace the lobbies of every resort hotel. Small vases on hundreds and hundreds of restaurant tables, each sporting a perfect single bloom. Not to mention the extraordinary orchids – and backyards! – cultivated by local folks in every neighborhood across Maui Nui. From smiling birds-of-paradise to other-worldly protea, flowers play a huge role in the visitor experience and they have to come from somewhere. Happily, many of them are born and raised in the most verdant areas of Maui.

A bit about lei history and etiquette. The tradition of wearing lei or neck garlands came from the early Polynesian voyagers to these Islands. Ancient Hawaiians wore lei – made from flowers, leaves, shells, seed, nuts, feathers, bone. and teeth – both as adornments and to distinguish themselves. Perhaps most significant in ancient Hawai‘i was the maile lei. This garland made of fragrant vines was used to acknowledge peace agreements between warring chiefs. Maile lei are still revered today and often reserved for the most important occasions – weddings, funerals – and the most important people gathered at them.

Since ancient times lei have been – and still are – an integral part of Hawaiian cultural practices. This is most obvious, perhaps, in the hula tradition. A kahiko (ancient) hula “costume” is not complete without lei – not just neck lei but garlands of traditional foliage woven into adornments for the head, wrists, and ankles, as well. And ‘auana (modern) hula attire always showcases spectacular flower and shell lei.

Lei-giving and lei-wearing became fashionable among visitors as soon as they “discovered” Hawai‘i. In the earliest days of tourism – affectionately remembered as the “Boat Days” – lei sellers would line the pier at Aloha Tower to welcome both visitors and returning residents. Departing visitors would often toss their lei into the sea as the boats sailed past Diamond Head, hoping they, like their lei, would return someday. Today, the perfect start to an Island vacation is to be greeted with a lei and a warm “Aloha.”

There are no “rules” for when it is appropriate to wear a lei. ANY day is Lei Day in Hawaii! And it is absolutely fine to purchase a lei for oneself. Local folks always put on their always-handly “perpetual” lei – made of nuts, seeds, shell, feathers – just because it looks lovely.

There is some etiquette, however, with which visitors should be familiar. Giving a lei is a warm, affectionate gesture and so it is considered terribly bad manners to refuse one. It is also

rude to remove a lei in the presence of the person who gave it to you. The very best thing to do is accept it graciously, wear it proudly, and enjoy it just as all local folks do.

Upcountry Kula is famous for its myriad variety of protea – flowers that really don't look like flowers at all. Even the names of the varieties suggest something other than flowers – pink minks, pincushions, sunbursts. Although there are no guided tours, Proteas of Hawai'i (808-878-2533; [www.proteasofhawaii.com](http://www.proteasofhawaii.com); Mon. – Fri. 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.;;) welcomes visitors to stroll among the fields.

Right across the road is the University of Hawai'i Maui Agricultural Research Station, Hawai'i Institute for Tropical Agriculture (Mauna Place off Copp Road; 808-878-1213; Mon. – Thurs. 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; closed Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and State holidays). A free map is provided for a self-guided tour around the colorful rows of flowers including protea and the All-American Rose Garden.

Further up Haleakalā – at a cool elevation of about 4,000 feet – Sunrise Protea Farm is open daily (808-876-0200; [www.sunriseprotea.com](http://www.sunriseprotea.com)) and invites visitors to walk among the unusual bushes and plants that bloom in even more unusual shapes, sizes and colors. An on-site gift shop sells fresh bouquets and wreaths. Protea, by the way, dry beautifully and so make for lasting mementos.

Kula's perfect growing conditions – warm and dry in the summer, cooler and wetter in the winter – provide happy homes for, literally, hundreds of varieties of flowers and foliage.

Enchanting Floral Gardens of Kula is an eight-acre botanical garden established almost two decades ago (808-878-2531; [www.flowersofmaui.com](http://www.flowersofmaui.com); 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily; \$5 per person admission) and which contains more than 1,500 species of tropical and semi-tropical plants from around the world including orchids and fruit trees. The gardens have banks of glorious flowers including protea, orchids, hibiscus, and jade vines among many other varieties. A collection of native plants and birds can be found at the Kula Botanical Gardens (808-8781715; 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily; \$5 per person for adults; \$1 per child six to 12 years old; children under six free). Some of the Hawaiian native fauna here are on the endangered species list.

Kula's Paradise Flowers Farms (808-878-2591; [www.paradiseflowers.com](http://www.paradiseflowers.com); open daily) specializes in cultivating flowers used for lei, including the fragrant tuberose and American rose

varieties. The public is welcome to roam the fields; there are plans to break ground soon for a new agritourism facility which will feature lei-making demonstrations.

Maui's lush, tropical windward side also provides perfect growing conditions for flowers and foliage. Ha'ikū has two distinctive flower growers. The Garden of Eden Arboretum & Botanical Garden (808-572-9899; [www.mauigardenofeden.com](http://www.mauigardenofeden.com); 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. daily; \$7.50 per person admission) is a beautifully landscaped 27-acre property dedicated to restoring natural ecosystems and promoting Hawai'i's native and indigenous species. Featuring many exotic plants and trees from the South Pacific region and tropical rainforests of the world, there is also an extensive collection of ti plants.

Huge clean and neat greenhouses at Exotic Orchids of Maui (808-575-2255; [www.mauiorchids.com](http://www.mauiorchids.com); by appointment; free admission) hold many varieties, hundreds of plants and thousands of blooms. The owners are very knowledgeable happy to share information about these provocative flowers.

Wear good walking shoes and rain gear; carry insect repellent, sunscreen, and extra water for the self-guided tour of the six-acre Ke'anae Arboretum, located about halfway to Hāna. The first 1/2 mile of the trail passes through introduced plants such as ornamental gingers, papaya, and hibiscus. At the end of this section is a taro patch (lo'i kalo) filled with lots of Hawaiian varieties of this essential food source. The next one-mile section of the trail leads through a Hawaiian rain forest.

Just outside Hāna town is Kahanu Garden (National Tropical Botanical Garden) (808-248-8912; [www.ntbg.org/gardens/kahanu.html](http://www.ntbg.org/gardens/kahanu.html); 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Mon. – Fri.; \$10 per person for a self-guided tour). Here, too, it is advisable to wear comfortable walking shoes, long pants, a hat for shade and to carry bottled water and mosquito repellent. The Garden's 122 acres encompass plant collections from the Pacific Islands, concentrating on plants of value to the people of Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia. The garden includes the largest collection of breadfruit cultivars with more than 120 varieties grown on the grounds. Kahanu Garden is also the site of Pi'ilanihale Heiau, one of the most culturally significant – and extraordinarily large and imposing – religious sites in Hawai'i as well as a National Historic Landmark.

Central Maui, too, provides opportunity to experience unique floriculture. On the road to historically important and very beautiful 'Īao Valley is Tropical Gardens of Maui (808-244-3085; [www.tropicalgardensofmaui.com](http://www.tropicalgardensofmaui.com); 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Mon. – Sat.; \$3 per person), a

four-acre botanical garden and export plant nursery started in 1987 as a showcase for tropical plants from all parts of the world. The self-guided tour through the garden crosses 'Īao Stream, passing a koi pond and palm grotto. The hillside above has been terraced and planted with numerous varieties of Hawaiian taro.

Located within the Valley itself, Kepaniwai Park's Heritage Gardens was established in 1952 as a showcase for Maui's diverse heritage with ethnic houses and gardens representing the Hawaiian, Portuguese, Japanese, Caucasian and Filipino cultures. The cool waters of the 'Īao Stream flow through these gardens, feeding ponds and small waterfalls. This tranquil, picturesque spot is perfect for relaxing and picnicking.

Sadly, much of Hawai'i's indigenous flora and fauna have all but disappeared over the last two hundred years. The good news, however, is that Maui Nui Botanical Gardens in Kahului (249-2798; [www.mnbg.org](http://www.mnbg.org); 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Mon. – Fri.; 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sat.; closed Sundays and major holidays; free admission) is dedicated to these endangered species, many of which are extremely important in cultural practices. A seven-acre site planted in 1976 by Rene Sylva is devoted entirely to coastal and dry forest plants of Maui Nui. It is lovingly tended today by Lisa Raymond and her devoted followers.

The Nature Conservancy (808-572-7849; [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org)) does an admirable job of managing Maui's fragile natural resources and schedules hikes through some truly extraordinary places.

On neighboring Moloka'i, visitors will find the largest producer of plumeria in the State of Hawai'i. Molokai Plumeria (808-553-3391; [www.molokaiplumerias.com](http://www.molokaiplumerias.com); please call for a tour appointment) offers morning tours, which end with guests picking their own blossoms and making lei. A perfect way to stop and smell the flowers.

