

`ūlei (Osteomeles anthyllidifolia)

ROSACEAE, Rose Family



This species is native to the Cook Islands, Tonga, and the main Hawaiian Islands (Wagner et al. 1990).

Other Hawaiian names for this species are *eluehe* (Pukui and Elbert 1986) and *u`ulei* (Wagner et al. 1990). Many modern *kama`āina* botanists have been taught the name of this species as *u`ulei* (I. A. Abbott, University of Hawai`i at Mānoa Botany Dept., October 1996, pers. comm., and pers. observ., ACM)

Summary statement of uses: The wood of `ūlei was used in making fishing tools (fishing net frames, fishing spears), agricultural tools (*kapa* beaters), musical instruments, and carrying poles. The berries were used for wild food and in making a blue-purple dye for *kapa*. The leaves and bark were used medicinally.

Pukui and Elbert (1986) wrote of this species, "The wood is tough and formerly used for making digging sticks, fish spears, and the `ūkēkē (musical bow)." The tough wood of this species was also used for *auamo* (carrying poles) and hand fishing net frames (I. A. Abbott, University of Hawai`i at Mānoa Botany Dept., October 1996, pers. comm.).

In an eloquent description of the use of *`ūlei* in making *`ōpelu* or mackeral scad (*Decapterus*) nets, Degener (1945) states, "The *uulei* has very strong but pliable wood. Its long branches were therefore stripped of bark and tied to the rims of fish traps to keep them open. In this way, for example, the Hawaiians constructed their nets for catching the *opelu*, a fish that swims in schools and is a favorite for eating raw either when freshly caught or after it has been dried in the sun. A net about twenty-five feet long was prepared by sewing it in the form of a huge bag. To the upper rim of the wide mouth a series of long, slender branches of the *uulei* were fastened to keep it gaping. This was then lowered on ropes in moderately deep water by the fishermen in their outrigger canoes. In the meantime, grated taro had been cooked and tied in *kapa*. This was then lowered as bait on a string into the sea so as to hang midway between the surface and the bottom. When a school of *opelu* had been attracted by the taro, the net which had been hanging below the bait, was carefully raised toward the surface. The enclosed fish, made frantic with fright when one of the fishermen would perhaps jump in among them, would dart in all directions and be caught by their gills in the meshes of the net."

Lennox (1967) wrote of this species, "Used for *opelu* nets, bows, *kapa* mallets, *ukeke* boards, short javelin for game *pahee*."

A blue-purple dye from berries was used for dyeing *kapa* (Neal 1965). Chun (1994: 265) describes the use of leaf buds of *`ūlei* as part of a medicinal cure. Bark of *`ūlei* mixed and pounded with young *kukui* nut and leaf, then strained, was used as a mild enema (Gutmanis 1977). *`ūlei* berries were eaten by Hawaiians as wild foods (Handy and Handy 1972: 235)

`Ūlei, as well as other dryland forest trees *`ahakea*, *alahe'e*, *ʻiliahi* (as *ʻaoa*), *naio*, *neneleau*, and *wiliwili* are mentioned in the Hawaiian creation chant, Kumulipo (Beckwith 1972). The *`ūlei* tree is matched with the *umaumalei* eel (Beckwith 1972).

Status at Auwahi: This species is common throughout Auwahi.