

# *`a`ali`i* (*Dodonaea viscosa*)

SAPINDACEAE, soapberry family



This species is pan tropical and native (indigenous) to the Hawaiian Islands (Wagner et al. 1990:1226)

Other Hawaiian names for this species are *`a`ali`i kū makani* (literally *`a`ali`i* standing [in] wind), *`a`ali`i kū ma kua* (literally *`a`ali`i* standing in back) (Pukui and Elbert 1986) and *kū makani* (Wagner et al. 1990:1227).

Regarding names of this genus in the Pacific, Rock (1913) noted, "It is known to the Samoans as *Togovao*, who employ its leaves for baths as a remedy for rheumatism and other inflammations. In the Viti (Fiji) Islands it is the *Wase*, and in Tahiti, *Apiri*. It is the *Ake* of Rarotonga and New Zealand; in the latter place often called *Akeake*."

Summary statement of uses: The strong dark brown-red wood of *`a`ali`i* was used in house construction and in making weapons, agricultural tools, and fishing tools (squid spears and lures). The leaves were used medicinally. The fruit capsules were used in making a red dye and in making *lei*.

Degener (1945) stated, "The dodonaea were sacred to Laka and to Kapo, the goddess of the hula. Various parts of the plant were used by the old Hawaiians. Because of the extreme hardness and durability of the wood, the dodonaea when found of sufficient size were sometimes cut into timber for building houses, or fashioned into spears and other weapons. The brilliant red capsules were also gathered, placed in a calabash with water and brought to a boil by dropping hot stones among them, The liquid, becoming as red as ink, was strained and then used for dyeing *kapa* and other articles."

`A`ali`i fruit capsules soaked in just boiled water yielded a bright red dye which took easily to cotton fabric and held relatively well (Cathy Davenport & ACM unpublished).

Hillebrand (1888) noted, "It is valued for its hard-grained, dark wood". Kamakau (1976) stated that `a`ali`i wood was used for making ``, agricultural digging sticks. Kamakau (1976) wrote, "Hardwood trees such as *uhiuhi*, the *naio*, the `a`ali`i, the *mamane*, the *pua*, and other trees with hard wood were suitable for house posts. The posts were sometimes three yards long; those used for the houses of the chiefs and the prominent people might be four yards long; five yards was the limit for the length of a post. They had to be dragged." It is worth noting that all the tree species that Kamakau mentions as suitable for posts for house construction are tree species characteristic of leeward areas.

Kamakau (1976) and Buck (1957g) described the use of `a`ali`i wood in making bait sticks, *la'au melomelo*, a type of lure used in net fishing. A more detailed description of *melomelo* fishing is given under the *kauila* listing. Rock (1913) stated that the leaves of `a`ali`i were used as medicine.

Handy and Handy (1972:240) wrote of `a`ali`i *kū ma kua*, "A tree with very hard heartwood, yielded leaves of medicinal value, used particularly on Kaua'i."

Pukui (1983) related expressions regarding the `a`ali`i including:

"*He `a`ali`i ku makani mai au; `a`ohe makani nana e kula`i* (

I am a wind resisting `a`ali`i; no gale can push me over)

A boast meaning 'I can hold my own even in the face of difficulties.' The `a`ali`i bush can stand the worst of gales, twisting and bending but seldom breaking off or falling over."

Status at Auwahi: Though apparently much depleted, `a`ali`i is still very common at Auwahi and in most of the districts of leeward Haleakalā from near sea level to at least 7500 feet elevation.