

`iliahi-a lo`e (*Santalum ellipticum*)

SANTALACEAE, sandalwood family



Santalum ellipticum Gaud.

This species is endemic to the main Hawaiian Islands (Wagner et al. 1990).

Santalum freycinetianum Gaud. var. *lanaiense* Rock

This species is endemic to Kaua`i, O`ahu, Moloka`i, Lāna`i, and Maui (Wagner et al. 1990). The variety *lanaiense*, endemic to Lāna`i and Maui, is considered an Endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Another Hawaiian name for this species is *`aoa* (Pukui and Elbert 1986) *laau aala* (Degener 1945), and *la`au ala* (Hillebrand 1888). Literally, *la`au ala* means "fragrant plant". In Oceania, sandalwood is known as *eai* in Tahiti, *yasi* in Fiji, *mairi* in New Zealand (Hillebrand 1888). Hillebrand (1888) postulates that the Maori name *mairi* is a "transfer" from another fragrant plant, the *maile* (*Alyxia olivifolia*) which does not occur in New Zealand.

Summary statement of uses: The wood of *`iliahi* is favored for making the *pola*, the sometimes covered platform on a double canoe (Holmes 1981). Degener (1945) stated, "They used the powdered heartwood as a perfume and frequently sprinkled it among their *kapa* to offset the objectionable odor that was particularly strong shortly after its manufacture".

Kamakau (1976) notes the making of *maku`e*, a red and brown mottled *kapa* made by "beating in *`iliahi* (sandalwood) and *pala`a* (fern)." Chun (1994: 166) noted that this species was used as medicine.

`Iliahi (as *‘aoa*), as well as other dryland forest trees *‘ahakea*, *alaha`e*, *kauila*, *naio*, *neneleau*, *‘lei*, and *wilivili* are mentioned in the Hawaiian creation chant, *Kumulipo* (Beckwith 1972). The *‘iliahi* tree is matched

with the *palaoa* translated with a question mark as ‘walrus’ (Beckwith 1972). In translating *palaoa*, the Hawaiian dictionary (Pukui and Elbert 1986) does not include ‘walrus’, but instead considers the primary meaning as a more logical ‘sperm whale’.

Status at Auwahi: *Santalum ellipticum* is common on leeward Haleakalā from near sea level to nearly 5000 feet elevation. *Santalum freycinetianum* var. *lanaiense* is much rarer, known from two to three hundred individuals in Auwahi. Despite large size (almost 50 feet tall) and bearing prolific amounts of viable seeds, damage by introduced rats and the unsuitability of its current pasture-like habitat has nearly eliminated natural regeneration by seed.