



Aalii

Dodonaea viscosa Jacq. (synonym: *D. erocarpa* Sm.)

Common names: aalii, aalii ku makani, aaliikumakua, kumakani

Native habitat

Aalii is a pioneer species and common forest species in Hawaii. It is found on all main islands (except Kaho-olawe) from dunes at sea level up through leeward and dry forests and to the highest peaks. It is widespread throughout the tropics.



Characteristics

Aalii is a highly variable, evergreen, many-branched shrub or small tree, 3–10 feet high, with reddish-brown to gray or blackish-gray bark. Its narrow leaves (1–4 inches long) are alternate, short-stemmed, glossy green with reddish midribs and stems, somewhat spatula-shaped, and may be blunt or pointed. The inconspicuous flower clusters are produced at branch tips, with male and female flowers usually found on separate plants (dioecious). The flowers have no petals. The fruits vary in color from yellow to green, pink, red, brown, and dark maroon. The fruits have two to four broad-winged angles and contain two to four cells with one or two ovate seeds that are sometimes sticky.

Landscape uses

Aalii can be used as a specimen, an informal hedge or screen, and (with time) as a small tree. It is a highly variable plant, and selected, cultivated forms should be used when possible. Only one selection has been made and named by local nurseries. The foliage texture is medium, the flowers are not ornamental, but the fruit is interesting.

Culture

Aalii has a very broad natural range in Hawaii, from coastal areas to high, dry mountain sites. It is best planted in full sun in a well drained, well aerated soil. It has good wind and drought tolerance (once established) and moderate tolerance of salt. It is a tough plant with a strong root system and a moderate growth rate. It responds well to pruning.

Propagation

Aalii is best grown from seeds, but availability of seeds is limited due to insect problems. To aid germination of the tiny, hard seeds, place them in water that has been brought to a boil and removed from heat, and leave them to soak for about 24 hours.

Insect and diseases

Aalii is relatively pest-free, but some problems from mealybugs and aphids may occur. Caterpillars of the blackburn butterfly (*Udara blackburni*) feed on the flowers and buds.

Additional notes

This extremely variable species has been separated into four native Hawaiian species by some botanists, but current authorities consider it as one species. A cultivar, 'Purpurea', has purplish-red foliage and seeds. The seed capsules are prized for haku leis and are useful in flower arrangements, fresh or dried. A red dye may be extracted from the fruit, and the leaves have been used medicinally. The hard wood, yellow-brown with darker heartwood, has been used for tools, weapons, and construction.

Fred D. Rauch, Heidi L. Bornhorst, Rhonda Stibbe, and David Hensley, CTAHR Department of Horticulture

*Replaces Instant Information/Ornamentals and Flowers Series no. 20.