

The Kukui Nut Tree

Introduction

The Kukui Nut tree, also known as the Candlenut tree, is an important plant to Hawaii. The seeds were originally brought to Hawaii on the Polynesian sailing canoes; it is considered a “canoe plant”. Its scientific name is *Aleurites moluccana*. The Kukui Nut tree is a medium-sized tree with shiny, green leaves and small, white flowers. It produces roundish nuts inside a hard shell. Kukui nuts are very useful in many ways. This tree has been used by Hawaiians for many purposes, including medicine, traditional ceremonies, and recreational activities. Additionally, the Kukui Nut tree holds special significance as the state tree of Hawaii, the symbol of the island of Molokai, and the symbolic embodiment of the Hawaiian demigod Kamapua‘a. Let’s explore the many ways the Kukui Nut tree has been used.



Medicinal Uses

1. **Skin Care:** The oil from Kukui nuts is often used to treat dry skin, rashes, and sunburn. It helps keep the skin moisturized and can even help heal wounds.
2. **Hair Care:** Kukui nut oil is also used in hair products to make hair shiny and healthy. It can help with dandruff and dry scalp and to promote hair growth.
3. **Digestive Health:** The oil can be taken in small amounts to help with digestion and to relieve constipation.

Traditional Hawaiian Uses

1. **Lei:** The Kukui Nut is used in Hawaiian ceremonies and rituals. The nuts are strung together to make leis or used in other ceremonial decorations. Leaves can be woven to make decorative lei.
2. **Lighting:** In ancient times, Kukui nuts were burned to provide light. The nuts were used as natural candles, with the oil-soaked nuts providing a steady flame.
3. **Crafts and Art:** The hard shells of Kukui nuts are used to make various crafts and jewelry. The nuts are polished and carved into intricate designs for use in jewelry.
4. **Cultural Symbolism:** Kukui trees were often planted near homes and places of worship as symbols of enlightenment and protection. The tree and its nuts were considered sacred and were used in many cultural practices. Kukui nuts often are used to represent enlightenment and guidance.
5. **Medicine Bags:** Kukui nuts were sometimes used in traditional Hawaiian medicine bags, which were worn for protection and healing.
6. **Hula and Music:** Kukui nuts are used in traditional Hawaiian hula and music. They are strung together to make rattles used in dances and chants.

Inamona: Traditional Hawaiian Food

Inamona is a traditional Hawaiian food made from roasted Kukui nuts. Here's how it is made and used:

1. **Preparation:** To make inamona, Kukui nuts are first roasted until they are dark and fragrant. The nuts are then crushed into a coarse, chunky texture.
2. **Seasoning:** The roasted and crushed nuts are mixed with salt and sometimes other seasonings, such as crushed chili peppers. This mixture creates a flavorful condiment.
3. **Uses:** Inamona is commonly used as a topping or side dish. It adds a nutty, slightly salty flavor to various dishes, including poke and poi. It can be mixed into salads and other traditional Hawaiian foods.
4. **Cultural Significance:** Inamona is more than just a food item; it is a staple in Hawaiian cuisine and holds cultural significance. It represents the traditional methods of preparing and using Kukui nuts that have been passed down through generations.

Symbolic Significance

1. **State Tree:** The Kukui Nut tree is designated as the state tree of Hawaii. This recognition reflects its importance in Hawaiian culture and history.
2. **Island Symbol:** The Kukui Nut tree is also the symbol of the island of Molokai. This highlights the tree's special connection to the island and its role in the local heritage.
3. **Embodiment of Kamapua'a:** The Kukui Nut tree is considered the symbolic embodiment of Kamapua'a, the Hawaiian demigod known for his shape-shifting abilities and connection to agriculture and fertility. In Hawaiian mythology, Kamapua'a is associated with the Kukui tree, which represents enlightenment, growth, and protection.

Recreational Uses

1. **Toys and Games:** The nuts can be used to make traditional Hawaiian games like "kukui nut toss." The nuts are strung together to create a game similar to marbles or dice.
2. **Hū:** is an ancient Hawaiian game played with a spinning top made from the *kukui* nut. A twirl between the finger and thumb sets the top spinning on its tip. In competition, the hū that spins the longest within a circle wins.

Sources

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