



Hala

Pandanus tectorius (Parkins.) (synonym *Pandanus odoratissimus* L.F.)
Common names: hala, screw pine, pu hala, pandanus, walking fences

Native habitat

Hala is endemic to (at least) Kauai and naturalized on the major Hawaiian and Pacific islands as well as in Australia and southern Asia. It is commonly found in the lower forest areas and along the wetter shorelines and is abundant from sea level to 2000 ft elevation in Hawaii.

Characteristics

This impressive, rounded tree grows to 20–30 ft in height and has a similar canopy spread. It grows at a moderate rate. Its stout, wide-branching trunk is ringed with many leaf scars.

Hala is known for the many conspicuous, thick prop roots (*ule hala*) near its base. These roots provide support when, with age, the tree becomes top-heavy with leaves, fruit, and branches. Its 2-inch wide leaves (*lau hala*) grow 3–4 ft long. The leaves are light green to gray-green, are sharp-pointed, and have prickles along the edge. The foliage is arranged spirally along the trunk and in tufts at the ends of branches.

Male and female flowers are produced on different plants (dioecious). The male tree produces 1-inch long fragrant flowers (*hinano*) surrounded by narrow, white bracts. The female tree produces bract-surrounded flowers and round fruits. The fruits grow to 8 inches long and, with their many prism-like sections, resemble fruits of the pineapple. The “prisms” are actually many floral segments that are fused together at their base. Several dozen of these woody units comprise the visible fruit, which changes from green to yellow to bright orange or red as it matures.

Landscape uses

Hala is an excellent specimen or accent tree, but it is also useful in groupings or groves. Hala creates a tropical effect and makes a good beach plant, because it is highly tolerant of salt. Allow adequate space for its wide canopy. The foliage and overall texture are coarse.



Culture

Hala grows best in full sun, but young plants tolerate partial shade. It will grow well in many different soil conditions and environments, but it does best on managed sites with periodic irrigation. Remove the old brown leaves periodically. Scale and mealybugs may cause occasional problems.

Propagation

It is easy to start hala by division or seeds. Large terminal cuttings have been rooted with success.

Additional notes

Hala was well appreciated by the ancient Hawaiians, who used almost every part of the plant. Hala provided materials for housing, clothing and textiles, food, medicine, ornament, fishing, and religious uses. The variegated form of hala is used today as cut foliage by florists and flower arrangers. Several other *Pandanus* species are grown in Hawaii: *P. variegatus*—variegated leaves; sterile. *P. veitchii*—white-margined leaves; sterile. *P. polposus* var. *cooperi*—green leaves; fruits with wedge-shaped drupes. *P. polychphalus*—narrow leaves (1 inch); shrub to 15 ft. *P. utilis*—tall tree with reddish trunk; pale leaves with red prickles.

David Hensley, Rhonda Stibbe, and Fred Rauch
CTAHR Department of Horticulture

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