



Oahu White Hibiscus



Hibiscus arnottianus A. Gray

Common names: Oahu white hibiscus, kokio keokeo, kokio-keokeo, pa-makani, native white hibiscus
Native habitat: Hawaii (Oahu and Molokai)

Characteristics

Oahu white hibiscus is a multi-trunked shrub or small tree, growing to 24–30 ft high, with a dense crown of foliage and smooth trunk and branches. It is an evergreen tree. The leathery, dark green, ovate leaves are entire (with smooth margins) and are 2–6 inches long. The leaf veins and stems commonly are red. The tubular, slightly fragrant, solitary flowers, measuring up to 4 inches across, are white with pinkish veins or pure white with red filaments and a magenta staminal column. The papery fruiting capsule is about 1 inch long and contains seeds covered with yellowish-brown down.

Culture

Oahu white hibiscus is found in dry to wet forest areas at 1000–2500 ft elevation. It grows best under filtered shade in moist, well drained soils, but it will tolerate full sun and dry conditions. Periodic pruning is required to maintain size and promote flowering. There may be some problems with Chinese rose beetles, thrips, and aphids. Stink bugs may cause bud drop.

Landscape uses

Oahu white hibiscus may be used as a single specimen plant, in groups for mass plantings, or as a screen or hedge plant. It can be grown as a large container plant. Its medium-textured foliage and flowers make it attractive for landscape uses. It is best used in mauka (upland) sites



Propagation

Terminal or stem cuttings 4 – 6 inches long can be rooted with rooting hormones under mist. It may also be started from seeds, but seedlings may not be true to type. It can be grafted and air-layered.

Additional notes

Oahu white hibiscus has been used in hybridization with *Hibiscus rosasinensis*. Three subspecies are currently recognized:

subsp. *arnottianus*—has smooth young stems, leaves, pedicels, and calyces; native to Oahu (Wahiawa to Niu Valley).

subsp. *immaculatus*—has unusually deeply crenate leaves and a white staminal column; native to Molokai (Wailau, Waihanau, and Papalaua valleys).

subsp. *punaluuensis*—a robust form with moderately coarse pubescence on young stems, leaves, pedicels, and calyces; native to Oahu (Kaipapau to Waiahole).

Cultivars have been selected by the Harold L. Lyon Arboretum:

‘Kanani Kea’—a selection with large flowers and good form.

‘Shy Girl’—flowers with a pink blush on the back of the petals and edges.

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