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List of ornamental and useful plants cultivated on Huahine Island, French Polynesia. Part 2

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ABSTRACT

In the traditional culture of the Polynesians, the unity of nature and the human being regarded as its part was something obvious. A significant part of the flora and fauna of the Polynesian island of Huahine had a quasi-religious character, playing the role of a taboo, objects of culture, landmarks, and not infrequently even being used as medicine. The colonisation of Polynesia by European nations led to profound changes, also in the way the relation between a human being and nature was perceived, making the character of the latter more utilitarian. Elements of the Polynesian flora became a sought-after raw material in the woodworking industry, the furniture industry, and the cosmetics and perfume industry. The paper discusses selected elements of the flora of the Polynesian islands and the changes in the way they have been perceived and used.

Keywords: *Fagraea berteriana*, *Etilingera elatior*, *Solenostemon scutellarioides*, *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, *Russelia equisetiformis*, *Alpinia purpurata*, *Jasminum grandiflorum*, *Codiaeum variegatum*, *Guettarda speciosa*, *Calophyllum inophyllum*

1. INTRODUCTION

Thanks to its fertile soil, the Polynesian island of Huahine is the site of intensive vanilla cultivation, and while admiring its wonders of nature, one can also acquire original products made from exotic plants and fruits. The island also features many archaeological sites from the time before the age of European colonisation. The present day in this area assumes the coexistence of the tourism industry and ensuring the preservation of the natural heritage of the

island. The following examples of the Huahine flora can be a starting point for further scientific analyses.

2. RESULT

2. 1. Pua Keni Keni, Perfume Flower Tree (Hauou, Haou Pua) *Fagraea berteriana* A. Gray ex Benth.



This tree was once "tabu" because of the status Polynesians originally gave it. This was the god *Tane*, god of the forest who brought the *pua* into the human's world. Its wood was exclusively dedicated to him and only his representations could appear on it. But nowadays, its wood is used for furniture and sculptures. This plant is more renowned for its odorous yellow flower than for its wood. Exhaling a heady fragrance, its flower called *pua* is used in the making of the famous Marquesas love potion, the *Kumu'hei* (or *Umu hei*).

2. 2. Porcelain Rose, *Etilingera elatior* (Jack) R.M. Sm.

Fond of water points, the porcelain rose first appears as a fragrant bud made of thick waxy petals. Once the bud blooms, a beautiful pink porcelain rose (or bright red, depending on the species) appears similar to porcelain at about 60 cm above the ground. Because they are long lasting and have incredible color, these beautiful flowers are essential to a Christmas bouquets.



2. 3. Indian Coleus (Terevete) *Plectranthus scutellarioides* (L.) R. Br.

This small native herb from India and China is perfectly naturalized in French Polynesia. Sometimes it is variegated red-green leaves, sometimes lime-green, sometimes red-purplish it makes beautiful bouquets and flower leis.

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2. 4. Hibiscus (Aute) *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* L.

This beautiful shrub was very important to the early Polynesians. Planted at specific locations the red *aute* (pronounced a-ou-te) helped the ancient Polynesian people to identify paths leading to mountain passes. The continuous blooming of its remarkable bright red flowers ensured the rapid visibility of this shrub that can reach 2 meters.

Tradition tells that the Polynesians also used hibiscus in *ra'au tahiti* (traditional medicine) for its antispasmodic and sedative properties. Tahitian rubbed petals to obtain a black dye they used to paint their bodies and faces. Europeans used this same black dye to polish their shoes.



2. 5. Firecracker Plant, Coral Plant, *Russelia equisetiformis* Schlecht. & Cham.

This plant embellishes gardens and public parks. Its intriguing name comes from the interpretation of its small red flowers scattered around the plant, like fireworks on a green night. French Polynesia the firecracker plant is ornamental but it is said that in Mexico this plant possess medicinal properties used to treat malaria and cure cancer.



2. 6. Red Ginger (Opuhi) *Alpinia purpurata* (Vieill.) K. Schum.

This decorative plant loves to embellish Polynesian gardens. The petals of *opuhi* are commonly found in the manufacturing of necklaces, wreaths and costumes for fashion and dance contests. It is also very interesting to come across girls wearing *opuhi* petals as false finger nails. Its popular and exotic appearance gives it an important role in bouquets of all kinds and for any occasion.



2. 7. Spanish Jasmine (Pitate) *Jasminum grandiflorum* L.

Even though this plant often has a bushy appearance, the Spanish jasmine is a vine and its innocent little white flower gives off a powerful and very sweet scent. Thanks to Jasmine tea, the relaxing properties are proven, like its cosmetic properties. Tip: Pick and wash some jasmine flowers, then soak them in hot water for 5 minutes and wash your face with this scented water. In a few days you will see your skin smoother and softer.



2. 8. Croton Plant (Ra'au Purepure) *Codiaeum variegatum* (L.) Rumph. ex A. Juss

The croton is an ornamental plant whose beauty and uniqueness of its leaves are very popular. Most commonly used to make colorful bouquets, the croton plant although slightly toxic, is also used in our *ra'au tahiti* (traditional medicine), to treat sprains and children's scratches. This remedy is locally called ra'au fati. All you need to do is to simply rub the leaves of this plant on your (childrens) scratches.



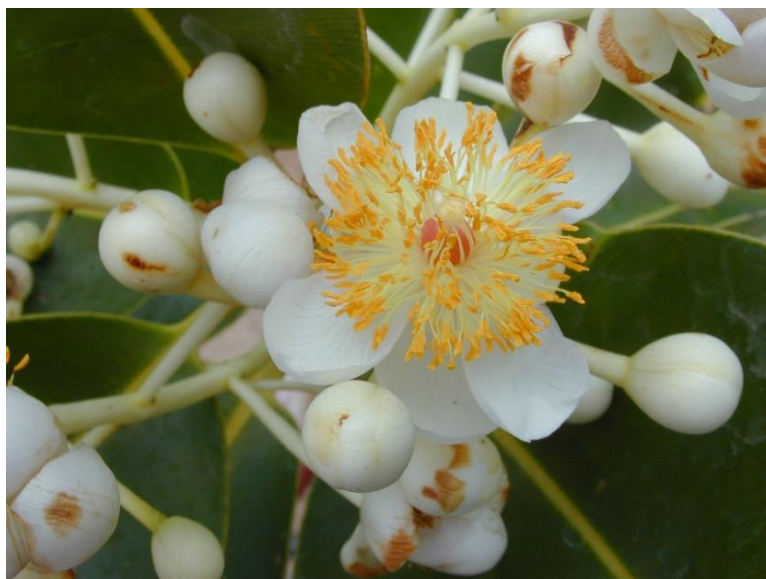
2. 9. Beach Gardenia, Zebra Wood (Kahaia, Tafano) *Guettarda speciosa* L.

Widely known for the durability and hardness of its wood, the *Tafano* (its Tahitian name) is generally used in carpentry. It is still widely used in the manufacture of houses and everyday objects. Fallen branches on the beach are used as fuel for the families who came under its welcoming shade to make a barbecue. When rinsed with seawater the leaves are biodegradable plates. Finally, the flower called *Kahaia*, will not leave you indifferent despite its size this little flower exalts its subtle although very powerful scent. Moreover the *Kahaia* is often used in *Monoï*. The roof structure and pôles of Lapita village are made of Kahaia Wood (known as local teck).



2. 10. Aexandrian Laurel, Beautyleaf Tree (Tamanu, Poroati, ‘Ati) *Calophyllum inophyllum* L.

The robust nature of the wood of this tree makes it a highly sought after for carpentry, sculpture and in the manufacturing of wooden *fare* (*houses*). The nuts are harvested to produce the Tamanu oil, also called the miracle oil. Polynesians from a very young age on are accustomed to this oil that is used for massaging newborns. It is used to relieve insect bites, to treat infections and sunburn. The anti-inflammatory and regenerative properties of *Tamanu* oil help moisturize, soothe and heal burns especially sunburn. One can also find oil *Tamanu* oil in cosmetics products like cream or ointment to beautify the skin texture and fight against cellular aging



3. CONCLUSIONS

The natural environment of the island of Huahine, which coexists with the responsible use of its natural resources by humans, is the reason why, despite the ceaseless tourist traffic, the place deserves the title of a paradise which for centuries has been continuously enchanting the natives and the tourists. Here, exotic nature found a perfect spot to function almost without interruption, intriguing both biologists and anthropologists and inspiring their research.

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