

GROUP KAI

This group, comprising three varieties, is distinguished by the concave, pendant blades with distinct, finely undulating margins, and by the tough rubbery texture of the cooked corms. The time of cooking is often twice as long as for other varieties. A fragrant odor (ala) is usually emitted when the corms are cooked: hence the name Ala is sometimes used, instead of Kai, for this group. It is difficult to make poi from the Kai taros by the old Hawaiian method of hand pounding the cooked corms on a poi board, and even in the commercial poi factories, where machines are used for grinding the corms, the Kai taros generally must be run through the machine twice before the poi is satisfactory. However, they give a high yield of paiai.

The Kai, the Piko, and the Lehua are the three most important groups of commercial taros. They are used almost exclusively for poi making, and are almost invariably grown under wetland culture. The Kai are very popular on Oahu and are planted in several localities on Oahu. Observations seem to indicate that they are more tolerant of alkaline conditions than any other group, and of stagnant water. They are also tolerant of deep or soft patches whereas most varieties require a firm, relatively shallow soil, and there is evidence that Kai are more resistant to soft root.

Although this group is widely planted and the corms have important and characteristic qualities, the Kai have no outstanding surface characters by which they may be readily identified, especially of the

specimen to be identified has been pulled from the field. Yet any experienced taro grower can readily recognize a Kai as he walks through a planting. The most outstanding feature seems to be the pendant position of the leaves. This apparently results from the slenderness of the petiole, especially above the petiole sinus, which causes the petiole to curve perceptibly and gives to the plant a generally widespread appearance.