

## Planting māmaki for Kamehameha butterflies

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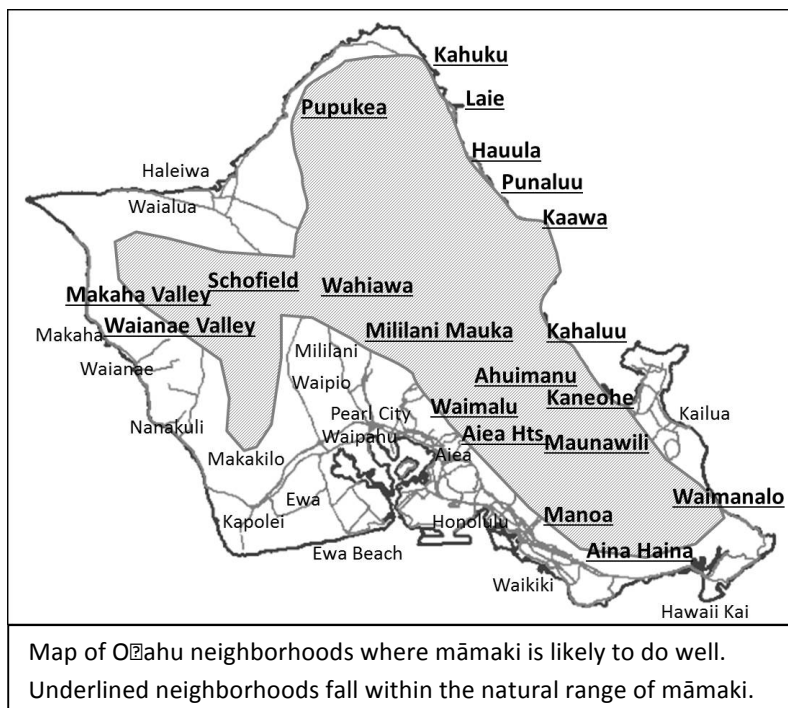
The Kamehameha butterfly (*Vanessa tameamea*) is one of only two native butterflies, and our state insect. It is unfortunately no longer found in most residential areas of Hawaii. Its native host plants have been outcompeted by invasive weeds. Introduced predators like ants and birds also have big impacts on its caterpillars. If you live in a wet area of the island, you can help by planting the most common Kamehameha butterfly host plant, māmaki.



### About māmaki:

Māmaki (*Pipturus albidus*) is a small native tree in the nettle family (Urticaceae). It is an important plant in Hawaiian culture; the leaves are used to make a popular tea and the plant fibers are used to make kapa (fabric).

**Where can I find māmaki?** Māmaki is easily grown from seeds, and is often found for sale at local nurseries and hardware stores.



### Where should I plant māmaki?

Māmaki requires a lot of moisture and protection from full sun and wind. It is best planted in areas of the island that receive a lot of rain. These are also the areas where you're most likely to attract the Kamehameha butterfly. Choose a sheltered location where the plant will be shaded for part of the day. Plants benefit from compost and light fertilization. Māmaki can grow to become a larger tree, but in a backyard setting, usually stays small and can be kept manageable by pruning.

**How should I protect plants?** The caterpillars of Kamehameha butterflies are vulnerable to predators like ants and birds. Protect plants from ants by either using ant baits (this will depend on which species of ant you have), or applying a sticky barrier around the base of the trunk (for example, Tree Tanglefoot). First prune away any branches or brush around the māmaki, so ants can't use these to bypass the barrier. Birds are tricky to repel, but bird netting may be helpful.

**Will butterflies find my plants?** The likelihood of attracting butterflies to your plants depends on many things, including how many plants are in your neighborhood, how close you are to natural populations of the butterfly, and what predators are present in your area. Residents of Hawai'i Island who live near native forest have had good luck attracting butterflies to their backyards. On O'ahu, Kamehameha butterflies have been sighted flying through residential areas on the windward side, so we are hopeful that permanent populations can be established in these areas. The more māmaki you (and your neighbors) plant, the better your chances!

**How will I know if my plants have been colonized?** Keep an eye out for caterpillars or feeding damage on your plants. Caterpillars build distinctive shelters by cutting flaps in leaves, and folding the flaps over themselves. The caterpillars live inside these "tents" and feed on the leaf from the inside. This type of feeding damage is very unique, and makes it easy to search for caterpillars on your plants.



A caterpillar shelter on a māmaki leaf

For more information, or if you have a Kamehameha butterfly sighting to report, please visit our website:  
[www.KamehamehaButterfly.com](http://www.KamehamehaButterfly.com)