



On May 1st, Lei Day is a celebration of Hawaiian culture, or the aloha spirit. This holiday was founded in 1929 and celebrations begin at dawn and conclude at dusk.

People commonly celebrate by giving gifts of leis to one another. Schools also put on plays and elect a Lei Day court of Kings and Queens to represent the different islands.

Each island has its own symbol that is composed of a color and a flower. Hawaii (the big island) is red, Maui is pink, Oahu is yellow, Molokai is green, Lanai is orange, Kahoolawe is gray, Kauai is purple, and Niihau is white. In the same order, the flowers are lehua, lokelani, 'ilima, kukui, kauna'oa, hinahina, mokihana, and a pupu shell (see pictures in same order below). Niihau is the only island without a plant as its symbol.

The importance of the lei to the Hawaiian culture is that it is meant to represent the unspoken expression of aloha. The meaning of aloha can be interpreted in various ways. Depending on the occasion, it can stand for farewell, greeting, love, hope, or joy. These are only a few examples of what aloha can mean, as there is no restriction to the symbolic meaning of the lei. Even though the lei lasts only a few days before the flowers begin to wilt, the representation of the lei lasts forever. This tradition is spread throughout the major islands on Lei Day. Each island has their own way of celebrating the holiday, as well as a different indigenous vegetation that makes up the lei and different techniques of assembling them.

Leis are an important part of Hawaiian culture and are worn and gifted as a part of special occasions such as graduations, weddings and birthdays. The tradition was brought over by Polynesian voyagers sailing from Tahiti. In the past, maile leis, known as one of the most sacred leis, were used in peace agreements between opposing peoples. In addition to wearing the lei as a source of beautification, the lei was a way to distinguish groups of people from one another. The lei comes with a set of unspoken rules such as wearing it over your shoulders, not removing it while around the person that gave you the lei, and refusing a lei is seen as disrespectful. Over the years the lei has grown to become an accepted symbol of Hawaii that greets many visitors each year.

Please join the EDI Committee in wishing everyone a Happy Lei Day!

