Limu: Our Hawaiian Tradition

Among Polynesians, Hawaiians are unique in their regular use of limu. In the olden times, limu was the third component of a nutritionally balanced diet consisting of fish and poi. While limu primarily supplied variety and interest, they also added significant amounts of vitamins and other mineral elements to the diet. A common part of the traditional Hawaiian diet, limu are still a common ingredient in foods enjoyed by all. Not only are limu sold in supermarkets, but original Hawaiian methods of preparation are still used.

Limu are served as vegetables in stews, poke, and salads; as condiments, adding zest to the meals; and are an important source of minerals, and vitamins, including vitamins A, C, B12, and riboflavin.

**Limu manauea & Limu ogō (Gracilaria coronopifolia)**

Two Gracilaria species, limu manauea and ogō (Gracilaria parvisipora) are used interchangeably. Limu manauea is 4"-6" tall, with cylindrical branches dark rose to light pink; ogō is taller (10"-12") with slightly flattened branches. **It is illegal to gather reproductive plants (with dark "bumps").** Hawaiian preparation involves lightly salting this limu; this species is also enjoyed by Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos.


© University of Hawaii, Botany Department 2002    Poster by Linda Preskitt
**Limu māneʻoneʻo**  
*(Laurencia nidifica)*  
Firm, erect plant, to 10 cm tall, arising singly or in tufts from an entangled base. Terete axes are relatively thin, 0.5 - 1 mm in diameter, branching rarely more than 3 orders with the main divisions sub-dichotomous. Next orders are varied: alternate, opposite, or occasionally whorled. Branchlets are short, with blunt, indented tips. Because of the high variation in color, branching pattern and texture, it is not simple to identify *Laurencia* species in the field.

**Limu wāwaeʻiole**  
*(Codium edule)*  
Plants are dark green with felt-like surface; form large mats. Found throughout the islands from low inter-tidal to sub-tidal, 6-10 feet depth. Requires careful cleaning as are attached in several places to rubble and coral. Usually chopped or pounded and mixed with salt. Under refrigeration may be kept indefinitely, but best if eaten within 10 days. Served alone with fish, seafood, or stew, or may be mixed with other seaweeds.
| **Limu ‘ele’ele**  
**(*Enteromorpha prolifera*)** | ![Limu ‘ele’ele](image) |
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<td>Very fine, dark green limu that grows in tufts on rocks in fine sand. Common in places with fresh water intrusion, such as streams or underwater springs. Cut 1/2&quot; above base and clean carefully (remove all sand). Add a light amount of salt after draining and refrigerate in tightly covered container. Will keep for up to ten days, when it will develop a fermented odor. Usually eaten in stews or with lomi fish. A small amount flavors a large stew.</td>
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| **Limu kohu**  
**(*Asparagopsis taxiformis*)** | ![Limu kohu](image) |
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<td>Plant has creeping basal portion from which soft, fuzzy uprights grow. Found on edges of reef in areas of constant water motion. Only uprights are collected; plants are rinsed thoroughly, soaked overnight, then lightly salted. Upper branches are pounded and rolled into balls the size of a walnut for indefinite storage. Used in small quantities as flavor is penetrating. Added to poke, lomi, and stewed beef. Favorite limu of most Hawaiians.</td>
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**Limu huluhuluwaena (Grateloupia filicina)**

Bushy, pyramidal plants with flattened stems and fine branches in one plane. Grows as small groups on rocks covered with fine sand. After washing, plants are usually finely chopped and lightly salted. Eaten with raw liver, raw fish; added to cooked beef at serving time; or eaten with dried or broiled he'e (octopus).

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**Limu līpoa (Dictyopteris plagiogramma)**

Branches are leaf-like, somewhat wavy, golden colored, with dark brown midrib. Plant gives off strong, characteristic odor. Found sub-tidally 3-15 feet depth or more; sometimes tossed up in large windrows. Leafy branches are washed, and heavily salted for indefinite storage. Young plants can be chopped or pounded, lightly salted, and refrigerated for current use. Spicy flavor good with fish and meat dishes, especially stews.
**Limu kala**  
*(Sargassum echinocarpum)*

Of all limu in the Hawaiian Islands, *Sargassum echinocarpum* is most important in Hawaiian cultural practices. This alga is used in the performance of a forgiveness ceremony (ho'o pono pono) held by families or individuals who are quarrelling among themselves. All persons in a family - whether directly involved in the dissension or not - are given a symbolic piece of this plant, and all sit in a circle and pray for forgiveness of each other, and for unity and harmony. This might take an hour or two, or days: the point is that everyone in the circle must be in unity with each other at the end of the ceremony. In this way, the use of an alga is unrivalled in the world.

**Limu pālahalaha**  
*(Ulva fasciata)*

Blade-like plants form light green branching ribbons, sometimes 2-3 feet long. Very common, often found attached to basalt rock and old coral. Easily collected; remove small black snails that feed on blades. Wash well and chop into 1" or less pieces. Mixed with other limu and served with raw fish, or added to light soups.