Iholena subgroup

**Iholena** is the name of a subgroup of cooking bananas in the AAB genome group. The subgroup was domesticated in the Pacific region and is named after the Hawaiian name of its most representative cultivar. The name refers to the colour of the fruit pulp, *iho* meaning core or heart and *lena* meaning yellow or yellow-orange[1]. The colour of Iholena fruits suggests that are high in pro-vitamin A carotenoids.

Iholena and Maoli-Popoulu bananas, which were also domesticated in the Pacific region, are loosely known as Pacific plantains because of their close relationship with African plantains.

They have become increasingly rare in the Pacific, but are still grown in Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia (where they are called Orea for 'yellow colour like turmeric'), Vanuatu, New Guinea, Tonga and perhaps other places. In Hawaii, they are mostly found growing wild in highland forests.

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**Morphological characteristics**

The underside of the cigar leaf is mauve, silvery, coppery, reddish or bronze-coloured, not to be confused with Mysore bananas, which also have pink on the underside of their leaves. The colour normally fades within a week but may persist for months. Some cultivars have this colour on the undersides of most leaves. The petiole has erect or slightly incurved margins.

Leaf habit is drooping, compared to the Maoli-Popoulus, which have more erect leaves.

The rachis is typically bare. The bunch is small to medium-sized. The fruit turn yellow early, when the pulp is still firm. At that stage, the fruit may require another 2 to 3 weeks on the plant to reach maturity. This trait may have contributed to their neglect.

The male flowers are generally yellowish or whitish, with hardly any pink on the compound tepal.
The stamens are long, curled and the colour of lavender. The free tepal is translucent with a small apicula.

The peduncle has a reddish colour. At emergence, the bud sheath is creamy, narrow and pointed.

The individual fruits jut out at right angles to the central axis and are rather loosely arranged.

The fruits are straight, angular or 'canoe-shaped', never crescentic. The pulp is salmon-coloured.

The male flowers contain inside the free tepal what Hawaiians call pilali, a honey-like nectar rich in nutrient.

Cultivars

- Gerei Langi
- Iholena lele

References


Further reading


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Photos of Iholena cultivars in the Musarama image bank

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