

Making a Lei Lā'ī

(Making A Lei Series)

O- 'Ohana goal (Why do the activity?) Family goal

“He lei pōina 'ole ke keiki”

A beloved child is a lei never forgotten.

In this “Making a Lei” series, your 'ohana will learn how to make various types of lei. In Hawai'i, a lei or flower garland is gifted from one to another to show love, appreciation, or congratulate someone. However, the lei is not only a floral one but can consist of shells, feathers, seeds, nuts, vines, paper, beads, etc. A lei, in a non-literal sense can also be referred to as a love relationship, a song or even a child. Below is a figurative definition of lei.

“Fig., a beloved child, wife, husband, sweetheart, younger sibling or child, so called because a beloved child was carried on the shoulders, with its legs draped down on both sides of the bearer like a lei.” [Hawaiian Dictionaries](#), [wehewehe.org](#).



Benefits:

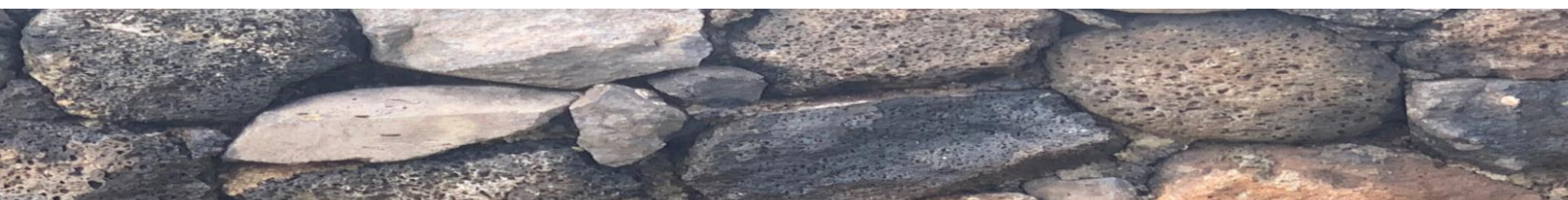
- For younger keiki, learning to twist and braid will help develop fine motor skills.
- For older keiki, lei making will support in cultural practices and lessons.
- Making lei as an 'ohana will strengthen family bonds, give opportunity to “talk story” and listen to family mo'olelo (stories), as well as create long lasting traditions and memories.

H- Ha'awina (Let's do the activity) Lesson, Assignment, Task

In this activity, we'll learn how to make a Lei Lā'ī (Ti leaf lei) using the hilo style, or twist style.

Materials needed:

- Lā'ī or ti leaves (5-8 medium to large)
- Scissors
- Moist towel (To wipe your hands)
- *Optional: Clothespins (To secure the end of the lei as you twist the leaf strands)



Process:

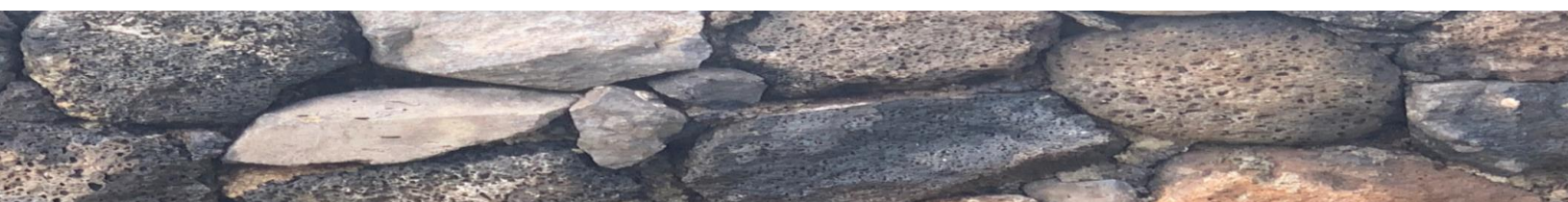
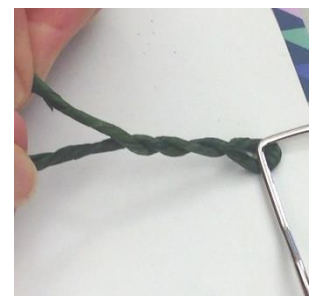
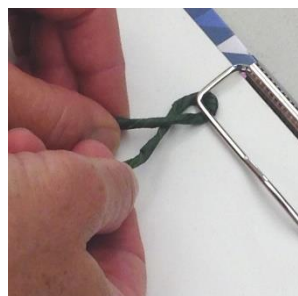
Preparing the Lā‘ī or Ti Leaves

1. **Pick the lā‘ī.** - Check your yard or ask friends and family.
 - a. It may be more meaningful to gather from a place that is special to you or your ‘ohana.
 - b. Remember to ask permission, physically & spiritually.
 - c. Follow any gathering protocols that you and your ‘ohana may have (ex. an oli komo, entering chant or an oli mahalo, appreciation chant)
2. **Clean the lā‘ī.** - Use a moist towel to gently wipe the leaves on both sides.
3. **De-bone the lā‘ī.** - Take a scissors and cut along the spine on both sides. You’ll end up with two halves of the ti leaf.
4. **Soften the lā‘ī.**
 - a. Fold a few leaves together and put them in a plastic bag in the freezer overnight, let them thaw and they are ready.
 - b. You can also cover them with moist paper towels and microwave for 1-2 minutes until softened.



Making the Lei Lā‘ī or Ti Leaf Lei

1. **Make a starting loop.** - Take one leaf (each “leaf” is now actually just half of one ti-leaf) and start to twist from the center until you have a 3-4 inch twisted strand. Be careful not to tear the leaf.
 - a. To create the twisted strand, gently pinch the center of the leaf with the fingers of both hands, then turn your fingers in opposite directions, fingers on one hand moving AWAY from you, the fingers on the other hand moving TOWARDS you. Continue twisting in this way until you have 3-4 inches of twisted strand.
 - b. Overlap the strand in the center to create a small loop (about 1 inch in diameter). Hold the loop in place. You can use clothespins, a clipboard, or have someone hold it for you.



2. **Twist and braid over.** - Take the strand that you twisted AWAY from you and pass it OVER the other strand and TOWARDS you. Take the other strand and twist away from you. Then take that strand and pass over the other strand and toward you. Repeat until you get to about 3 or 4 inches from the end of the leaf.
3. **Adding lā'ī.** - To add another leaf simply place the end of a new leaf on top of the old one. Let the new leaf stick out a couple of inches past where you will begin to twist again. Continue to twist as explained above, but this time with both the new and the old leaf in the same twist.



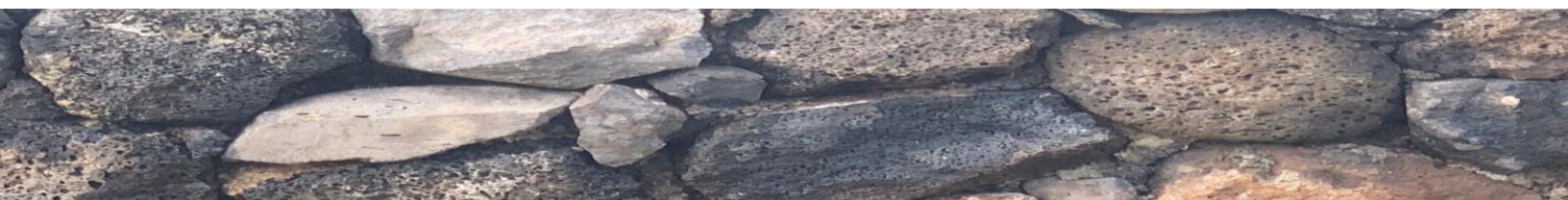
4. **Finishing the lei lā'ī.** - When your lei lā'ī is the length that you want, finish it off by tying a knot at the end with both strands then slipping the knotted end into the loop that you created in the beginning OR leave the ends open for a *maile style* look.
5. **Clean your lei lā'ī.** - "Clean" the ends by clipping off the pieces that stick out and trimming the parts that may be brown. You may also want to wipe down your lei lā'ī with a damp towel if it is sticky from the juices of the ti leaf when twisting.



A-Alaka'i (What did you learn? What can you teach?) To lead, Guide, Direct

Extension activities:

- Learn how to make different styles of lei lā'ī.
 - Lei lā'ī maile (*maile style ti leaf lei*)
 - Lei po'o (*head garland*)
 - Kūpe'e (*bracelet or anklet*)



Resources:

For video instructions, checkout this 6 minute video by Malika Dudley on how to make a simple double stranded lei lāī or ti leaf lei, [“How to Make a Ti Leaf Lei”](#):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUI5i0ZRw-M>

Here is another great resource on the history, uses and significance of the ti leaf (ki leaf) in Hawai'i: <https://www.canoepplants.com/ki.html>

