

Making a Lei Po‘o

(Making A Lei Series)

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

“He lei poina ‘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:

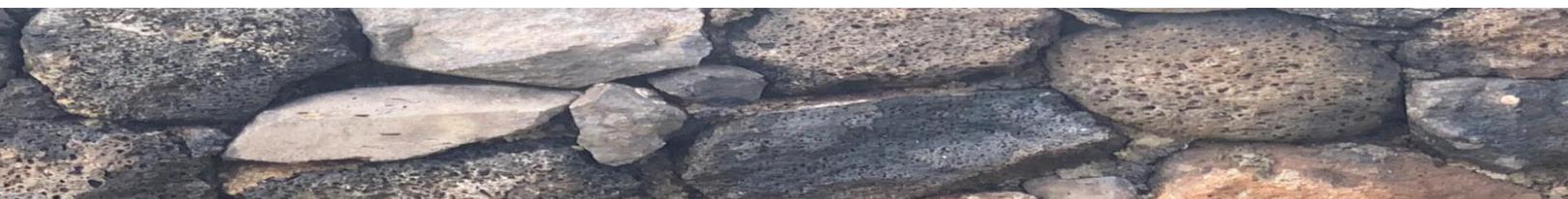
- For younger keiki, learning to twist and braid will help develop fine motor skills.
- For older keiki, lei making will support in cultural practices and lessons.
- Making lei as an ‘ohana will strengthen family bonds, give opportunity to “talk story” and listen to family mo‘olelo (stories), as well 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 Po‘o (lei garland) using the hilo style, or twist & braid style...

Materials needed:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6 medium to large Lā‘ī or ti leaves• 80 small kukui leaves• Scissors | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Optional: Moist towel (To wipe hands)• Optional: Clothespins (To secure the end of the lei as you twist the leaf.) |
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Process:

Preparing the Lā'ī (ti leaves) & kukui leaves

1. **Pick the leaves.** - 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 leaves.** - 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 of each lā'ī. You'll end up with two halves of the ti leaf.
4. **Soften the lā'ī.**
 - a. Fold or roll the halves of the lā'ī together, wrap them with a damp paper towel, and put them in a plastic bag in the freezer overnight. Thaw when ready to use.
 - b. You can also cover them with moist paper towels and microwave for 1-2 minutes until softened.



Making the Lei po'ō

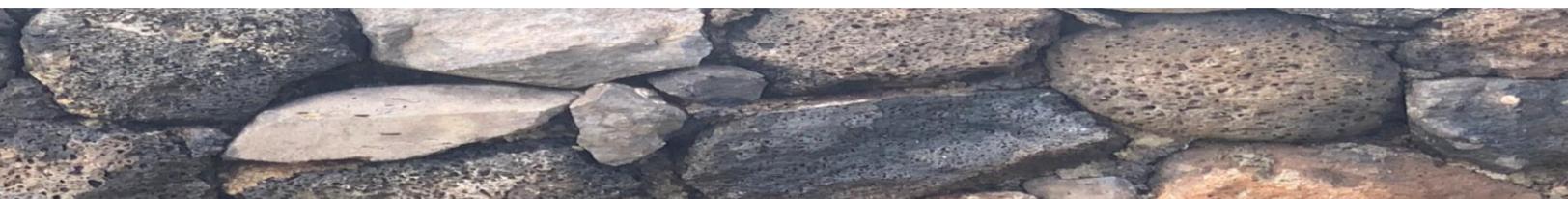
1. **Knot the end.** – Tightly twist and knot the ends of three halves of lā'ī (ti leaf) together to fasten the end of the lei.
2. **Braid.** – Braid the 3 halves of lā'ī until you have about a 6-inch length of braided lei. Make sure to leave excess leaf unbraided as seen in the first picture below.
3. **Fold one kukui leaf in half.** – Fold both sides to the center of the leaf, then fold whole leaf in half.
4. **Place the folded kukui leaf on the braided lā'ī.** As seen in the last picture, place the kukui leaf midway on the top lā'ī of the braided lei. Make sure there are 3-strands of unbraided lā'ī. These excess strands will be used to braid and fasten in the kukui leaves.



5. **Place a second folded kukui leaf over the existing kukui leaf.** You can choose to place 1-3 kukui leaves in one braid, depending how thick you want your lei po'ó.
6. **Twist and braid.** Continue the braid with the excess lā'ī, twist and braid over the outer most lā'ī strand on the side that has two lā'ī strands.
7. **Fold the kukui leaves up over the braid.**
8. **Repeat steps 4-7.** You can alternate the amount of kukui leaves you put into each braid. In the last picture there is one kukui leaf only.



9. **Twist and braid.** Continue the braid with the excess lā'ī, twist and braid over the outer most lā'ī strand on the side that has two lā'ī strands.
10. **Fold the kukui leaf up over the braid.**
11. **Continue the braid.** Add kukui leaves into each braid.
12. **Adding lā'ī.** – When the excess ti leaf get to short to braid, add another ti leaf by simply placing the end of a new ti leaf on top of the old one. Let the new leaf stick out a couple of inches past where you will begin to twist. Twist tightly so that both the new and the old leaf is fastened in the same twist.



13. **Keep a firm grip.** When twisting, braiding, and folding the leaves makes sure you keep a firm and tight grip on the lei to keep it fastened during and after the lei is finished.
14. **Check the back of the lei.** Once in a while check the back side of the lei to make sure your braids are tight and consistent. It should look like a “train track.” Immediately fix any areas that are loose.
15. **Finishing the end of the lei.** When you get about 12 inches of braided kukui and lā'ī you can begin to tie off the end of the lei. As seen in the third picture, continue to braid tightly from the last kukui leaf and continue braiding just the lā'ī.
16. **Braid about 6 inches of lā'ī.** Just like how you started the lei, braid a rope of lā'ī and knot the end.



17. **Trim and cut.** Clean up the lei by cutting the stems off the kukui leaves and trimming any excess leaves.
18. **Gift.** Your lei po'o is now ready to be gifted and worn. Remember, the lei you make is a symbol of your aloha (love) that you put into making it. Always, make lei with a good na'au (feelings) and good intentions.



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

Extension activities:

- Substitute the kukui leaves and make a lei po'ō (head garland) with other materials; laua'e, ferns, flowers, leaves. **Use greens from your garden or neighborhood OR go to a local farmers market to gather florals and greens.*

Observe: WHAT PLANTS IN YOUR YARD CAN BE USED TO MAKE A LEI?

Start a "hula garden;" plant trees, vines, and bushes that will provide florals and greens that could be used in lei making (ti leaf, ferns, plumeria, kaunaoa, pua kenikeni, laua'e, etc.)

Resources:

Checkout these great resources about the history and significance of the lei.

Video with Bill Char, "[Hawai'i's Long Legacy of Lei Making.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFcw1nG5djk)" The history and importance of the lei in Hawai'i: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFcw1nG5djk>

YouTube tutorial video of how to make a lā'i lei po'ō by Aili Fields. "[How to Make a Haku/ Lei Po'ō](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NLbYokYnl8)" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NLbYokYnl8>

