Hawaiian way is to let moon guide planting

HAWAI'I'S GARDENS By Duane Choy

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Not to put you in quiz mode, but which of these is not a typical response to the full moon in Hawai'i?

A. "That is so beautiful!"
B. "I can see my shadow from the moonlight!"
C. "Look at the rainbow around the moon!"
D. "It will be a good time to plant fruits!"

If you answered A, B or C, you're probably new to the Islands. If you answered D, you fell for a trick question, because the real answer would be "none of the above."

There is more to the moon over Hawai'i than just our gorgeous evenings. For years, Hawaiians have used the 29.5-day cycles of mahina (the moon) to determine, among other practices, when to plant crops.

The Hawaiian moon cycle is divided into three anahulu (10-day weeks). The first night of the cycle is the night after the new moon.

To help explain, I've taken some of the following information from David Malo's "Hawaiian Antiquities" (an 1898 work republished by the Bishop Museum), Martha Beckwith's "Kepelino's Traditions of Hawai'i" (a 1932 work republished by the museum) and Edward and Elizabeth Handy's "Native Planters in Old Hawai'i."

- **First week:** O'onui, "growing bigger."

Hilo ("faint," "slender," "wispy"), Night 1: Foods maturing underground will "hide" and may be small like the moon.

Hoaka ("crescent"), Night 2: A good day for planting, according to spiritual beliefs.

Ku Kahi, Night 3: The ku days are believed to be good for planting 'uala (sweet potato), kalo (taro) and mai'a (banana) because the plants will grow "upright" or "erect" (ku) in the lepo (soil).
Ku Lua, Night 4: Plants grow 'upright' or 'erect' (ku) in the lepo (soil).

Ku Kolu. Night 5 of lunar month.

Ku Pau, Night 6 of lunar month.

'Ole Ku Kahi, Night 7: An unproductive period, according to Hawaiian lore. 'Ole means "nothing," "without." The 'Ole Ku days are 7, 8, 9 and 10; these are the bad days for planting. Days 3, 4, 5 and 6 are the Ku days, which are good for planting.

'Ole Ku Lua, Night 8: Farmers generally dislike this day for planting.

'Ole Ku Kolu, Night 9: The farmer thinks little of this day, according to tradition.

'Ole Pau, Night 10: Pau means "end," so this time is considered to be unproductive.

**Second week: Poepoe, "round."

Huna, Night 11: Root plants are favored by the farmers because they will flourish, hidden (huna) under dense foliage like the ipu (bottle gourd) that hides under its leaves.

Mohalu, Night 12: The night for flowering plants, especially the ipu, mai’a and kalo.

Hua, Night 13: Hua means "fruit" or "seed" and it was believed to be bountiful on the 'aina (land) and kai (ocean).

Akua, Night 14: All things reproduce abundantly (ho’oakua). Offerings are made to increase growth of plants and food (mea’ai).

Hoku, Night 15: This was the fullest moon of the month — a day well-liked by farmers.

Mahealani, Night 16: The "calendar" full moon. Plants will be prolific and large if they are planted at this time.

Kulu, Night 17: Good time for potatoes and melons. The banana's sheath drops off on this day, exposing its new bunch.

La’au Ku Kahi, Night 18: Good time for planting mai’a. 'Uala, melons and ipu run to woody (la’au) vines. A time for gathering medicinal herbs and their preparations.

La’au Ku Lua, Night 19: A day much esteemed by the farmer, as the second of the three la’au nights. The moon has waned, and its sharp points (the ends of the moon) can be seen once more.

La’au Pau, Night 20: A day for planting in general.
• **Third week:** Emi, "decreasing.

'Ole Ku Kahi, Night 21: Farmers use this time for weeding.

'Ole Ku Lua, Night 22: Planting days for potato slips, banana suckers and gourd seed. Handy and Handy: "'Ole days are not good for either planting or fishing.'"

'Ole Pau, Night 23: Last 'ole night.

Kaloa Ku Kahi, Night 24: The time for planting those with long stems, long vines or long leaves, such as the mai’a, ko (sugar cane), wauke (paper mulberry) and 'ohe (bamboo). Hala (pandanus) will develop long leaves, desirable for weaving, if planted at this time.

Kaloa Ku Lua, Night 25 of lunar calendar.

Kaloa Pau, Night 26 of lunar calendar.

Kane, Night 27: Sacred to the god Kane. Prayers devoted to health and food.

Lono, Night 28: Farmers plant melons and ipu (bottle gourd), for they are kino lau (the embodiment) of the god Lono.

Mauli, Night 29: Uli means dark and reflects rich, dark-green vegetative growth. A good night for planting.

Muku, Night 30: The new moon; the end of the moon cycle. Mai’a will fruit bunches one muku long (a measurement from the finger tips of one hand to the opposite elbow, when both arms are extended to the side). Kumula‘au (trees) and ko will prosper but not recommended for 'uala.

This is a very abbreviated summary of the Hawaiian lunar calendar.

So, the next time you cast your gaze skyward to the moon, let the celestial night become your daytime planner.

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The month of the traditional Hawaiian calendar was determined by the 29.5-day cycles of mahina, the moon. The approximately 30 days of the moon cycle were divided into three 10-day weeks called anahulu. Notes on the lunar days and the activities associated with the days are from Malo (31-32) Kepelino's Traditons of Hawaii (98-112) and Handy and Handy's Native Planter (37-39).

Ho'onui: "Growing Bigger"

1. Hilo (faint thread; cf. puahilo, "faint, wispy"): a good day for planting, though tubers may be small like the moon (Handy and Handy); low tide till morning so women fished by hand and men went torch fishing; first day of kapu to the god Ku; "a day of death to man as a sacrifice to others"; the "wrongdoer would be put to death"; the kapu lasted till Kukahi or Kulua.

2. Hoaka (crescent; arch over the door; Handy and Handy say the name means "faint light" or "casting a shadow"; Kepelino says the name means "clear."): good day for planting; low tide till morning; kapu to the god Ku.

3. Kukahi (first Ku): moon seen in the western sky at sunset; the Ku days are recommended for planting sweet potato, taro, and banana, which will grow upright (ku) (Handy and Handy).".

4. Kulua (second Ku): end of the days kapu to Ku; a day of low tide, so people went down to the shore to fish.

5. Kukolu (third Ku): not good for planting sweet potatoes, bananas, gourds, as "they would just shoot up like coconut [trees]"); good fishing day (Kepelino).

6. Kupau (last Ku): end of the Ku days.

7. 'Oleku'kahi (first 'Oleku, days 7-10 mark the transition from less than half-lit moon to the more than half-lit moon): "the farmer does not plant on this day" (Kepelino); "Ole" means "nothing," so planting and fishing may be not productive in the three "ole" days [7-9 on the lunar calendar] (Handy and Handy).

8. 'Olekula'ua (second 'Oleku; Olekula'ua is the first quarter moon; the names for days 7-10 match the names of days 21-24 of the last quarter moon.): "farmers generally dislike it for planting"; "a good night for torching fishing" (Kepelino).

9. 'Olekukolu (third 'Oleku): "the farmer thinks little of this day"; "a good night for torch-fishing" (Kepelino).

10. 'Olepa'u (last 'Oleku): "it is a productive day, say the cultivators" (Kepelino). "Pau" means "end" so non-productivity is at an end (Handy and Handy).
Poepoe: "Round"

11. Huna ("to hide"); when the moon hides its "horns" and appears more rounded: "a productive day for cultivators"; "there is good fishing" (Kepelino).

12. Mohalu ("to unfold like a flower," "to blossom"): "a good day for farmers"; "on this night begins the kapu of the gods in the heiau and everyone goes to pray inside the heiau" (Kepelino). Handy and Handy say that it "sacred Kane, the life-giver"; good for fishing.

13. Hua ("fruit," "egg"); the first night of roundness: "In the old days it was a day of prayer, but in these new days the farmers like to plant on this day anything that bears fruit" (Kepelino); Handy and Handy say it was "sacred to Lono"; "good fishing."

14. Akua ("god"); the second night of roundness: "a great moon, beautiful and well-round" (Kepelino). "All things reproduce abundantly (ho'oakua)"; "kapu to the gods"; offerings made to increase growth of plants and fish (Handy and Handy).

15. Hoku (full; if the moon is still above the horizon in the western sky at sunrise, it is called "Hoku ili"—"Stranded moon"; if it has set just before sunrise, it is called "Hoku palemo"—"sunken moon."): "a day well liked by farmers" (Kepelino); "good fishing" (Handy and Handy).

16. Mahe-a-lani (mahe means "to grow less distinct," "to fade"); "mahea" means "hazy, as moonlight"; after the fullness of hoku, the moon begins to wane): "a day well liked by farmers" (Kepelino); "fishing is good"; "good for all work" (Handy and Handy).

17. Kulu (E.S. Craighill Handy, with Mary Kawena Pukui, gives this day name as "Kulu," which could mean "to drop" or "to pass, as time does"): "the farmers put their trust in this day. The potato or the melon will swell large" (Kepelino). "Good time for fishing" (Handy and Handy).

18. La'aukahi (first La'auku; during this sequence, the sharp "horns" of the moon begin to appear again): "a day rejected by the cultivator. The potato vine, melons, bananas, gourds, if planted on that day become woody (ho'ola'a'u) and do not form fruit" (Kepelino). Good for gathering and preparing herbs (la'au); "favorable for fishing" (Handy and Handy).

19. La'aukula (second La'auku): "a day much esteemed by the farmer" (Kepelino).

20. La'aukupau (last La'auku): "day for planting" (Kepelino).
"Emi: "Decreasing," "Waning."

The moon begins to lose its light. The last quarter moon rises around midnight and sets around noon. Muku, the new moon rises unseen with the morning sun and sets unseen with the setting sun.

21. 'Oleku(kah) (first 'Olek(u): "These are the days for planting potato slips, banana suckers, and gourd seed. A day of rough seas so that it is said, "nothing ['ole] is to be had from the sea" (Kepelino).

22. 'Oleku(lua (second 'Olek(u, the last quarter): "a good day for planting" (Kepelino). Handy and Handy say that all the 'ole days are not good for either planting or fishing.

23. 'Olepau (third 'Olek(u; the names of days 21-23 match the names of 7-10 days of the first quarter moon, and mark the transition from more than half-lit moon to less than half-lit moon.): On this day begins another kapu, this one for the god Kanaloa [Kalo] (Handy and Handy).

24. Kaloak(kah) (first Kaloaku): "a planting day, but the potato vine, melon, or banana will run to stem and the fruit will not develop quickly" (Kepelino). The second day of kapu and prayers to Kanaloa [Kalo] (Handy and Handy).

25. Kaloak(lua (second Kaloaku): "a good day for planting crops"; the kapu that began on 'Olekupau ends (Kepelino). The "loa" days (24-26) are good for plants with long stems, long vines, long leaves, such as bamboo, banana, sugar cane, potato and yam, wauke, and hala (pandanus) (Handy and Handy).

26. Kaloapau (last Kaloaku): The "loa"-days end.

27. Kane: "a day of prayer to the god Kane." (Kepelino). Night marchers, or ancestral spirits, walked on this night. After the ancient religion was abandoned, "a good day for planting potato"; "good for men who fish with lines and for girls who dive for sea-urchins" (Handy and Handy, Kepelino).

28. Lono: a day dedicated to Kane and "a day for thanking the god Lono for the whole month past" (Kepelino). "Prayers for rain" (Handy and Handy; Lono was a god of agriculture and rain). After the ancient religion was abandoned, "a day for planting crops. The potato, melon, pumpkin, coffee, orange and all such things will blossom abundantly" (Kepelino).

29. Mauli ("ghost," "spirit"; Malo: "fainting"; Kepelino: "last breath"): "a very good day for planting" (Kepelino). "Fishing is good" (Handy and Handy).

30. Muku ("cut-off." The new moon; the end of the moon cycle. The moon is in front of the sun; its backside is lit; its frontside, facing the earth, is dark.): "a day for planting crops, a day of low tide...a day of diving for sea-urchins, small and large, for gathering seaweed, for line-fishing by children, squid-catching uluulu fishing, pulu fishing, and so forth" (Kepelino).
The Hawaiians were spectacular navigators, perhaps among the best in the world. Not only did they have a deep understanding of the ocean and current, but also of the stars and the movement of the moon. That being the case, it should come as no surprise that the moon plays a very important role in the lives of the Hawaiians. Each lunar phase had a specific name in Hawaiian, and were associated with kapus as well as times for planting, fishing and gathering. Below we present all the lunar phases along with the Hawaiian names for each phase and a brief description of what that moon meant to the Hawaiians.

**Hilo**

The Hawaiian word *Hilo* has three meanings. First, *Hilo* was a famous Hawaiian navigator. Second, the word *Hilo* can mean twisted or braided. The third meaning for *Hilo* is the first, or new moon, and it was derived from the other two meanings. As the slender new moon sets in the western sky it often has a twisted appearance thus having the name *Hilo*. Also, because this is the first moon it acts as a navigator for the moons to follow.

Traditionally it was felt that this was a good moon for deep sea fishing but bad for reef fishing and gathering of any below ground roots and vegetables.

**Hoaka**

As with all words in Hawaiian, the word *Hoaka* has many meanings. The most literal meaning is *crescent* and this is indeed the first real crescent moon. Other meanings have to do with spirits and ghosts and it was often felt that the spirit of this moon, being the first moon bright enough to cast a shadow, would frighten fish away thus this was not a good night for fishing.

**Kū Kahi, Kū Lua, Kū Kolū, Kū Pau**

The 3rd through 6th moon phases correspond with the first four nights of Ku. The end of the first moon, Kūkahi ends the kapu (forbidden) period of Ku and marks a period where typically taro was planted (Kū means ‘erect’, thus the meaning here is for plants to grow strong and erect). This
The series of four days also indicates good fishing.

'Ole Kū Kahi  'Ole Kū Lua  'Ole Kū Kolu  'Ole Kū Pau

The 7th through 10th moon phase names all start with 'Ole which translates into nothing or unproductive. These days were named because fishing is poor due to high tides and rough ocean. Little planting was done until the final day where the ending pau, which means done or finished marked the end of the rough weather.

Huna

*Huna* means small, or hidden as well as thorned, or horned. Putting the two meanings together and we would have hidden horns which describes the shape of this moon. This is a good time for plants that normally hide, such as root vegetables and gourds. This is also a good time for fishing as the fish tend to hide in their holes.

Mōhalu

The 12th phase marks a sacred night to the God Kāne so fish and seaweed as well as fruits were forbidden to be eaten. However, this night was also good for planting vegetables for which you wanted them to resemble the roundness of the moon.

Hua

*Hua* means egg, fruit and seed, among other things. The meaning egg refered to the near full
shape of the moon. This was a sacred night to Lono and it was good luck for planting and fishing. The Hawaiians considered there to be four full moons and Hua marked the first of the full moons.

Akua

Akua means God, Goddess as well as corpse, devil and idol. This is the second full Hawaiian moon and is near the full round shape. This was a good night for fishing. Offerings were often made on this evening to the Gods where walking about.

Hoku

The third day of the four Hawaiian full moons was believed to be the fullest moon and was good for anything that was planted in rows.

Māhealani

This 16th lunar phase was the last night of the four Hawaiian full moon and was good for all types of work, planting and fishing. As you can see, the Hawaiians took full advantage of the four full moons.

Kūlua

The first moon following the four full moons was considered a time to give gifts of the first harvests to the Gods and Goddesses. Fishing was also considered good during this time.
The Hawaiian word Lāʻau means just about any type of vegetation, trees, etc. Thus these three nights were associated with trees and plants. Planting of certain types of fruit were discouraged during this period because they would be woody instead of tender, though other types of plantings could occur. This period was also an important time for the healers to go out and locate herbs for medicines.

Again we enter a series of three unproductive (ʻOle) nights. During this time people avoided planting and fishing, though farmers would weed and otherwise tidy up. The final day belonged to the Gods Kaloa and Kanaloa and people offered prayers to these Gods on this day.

The 24th through 26th lunar phase mark the three nights of Kaloa. The first night of Kaloa continues the worship of Kanaloa from the previous ʻOle Pau night. Planting of long stemmed plants as well as vines are encouraged and fishing is good through these three days, especially shellfish.
The 27th lunar moon marks a two day period of worship to the Gods Kāne and Lono. This was a very strictly enforced kapu and most of this period was devoted to prayer to the Gods.

The 28th lunar moon continues from the previous night of worship to Kāne and Lono, with emphasis switching to the God Lono and prayers for rain.

This moon usually rises with daylight. Fishing was encouraged due to lower tides and marriages were often performed on this day.

This final lunar phase finds the moon rising completely in the earth's shadow. Fishing is considered good.
For the next month, you are to track the phases of the moon. When you look outside on the first night, determine what phase the moon is in. You are not necessarily going to start on day one. When you determine your start point, name the moon phase, draw it, then explain the purpose of the phase. As the nights progress, you may need to adjust your documentation, so use a pencil. After a few days, check with your peers to compare your results.

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