

Crown Flower Care Card

Calotropis gigantea · pua kalaunu

Ka'ala Lush Nursery
Grown with aloha · Wai'anae, O'ahu

Quick answer: Crown flower (*Calotropis gigantea*, pua kalaunu) is a tough, drought-tolerant shrub that wants full sun, well-draining soil, and very little else. Water to establish, then let it fend for itself. It's the beloved lei flower of Queen Liliuokalani — and the host plant for monarch butterflies, so expect (and welcome) caterpillars eating the leaves.

Light	Full sun	Flowers	Lavender or white crowns, year-round in Hawaii
Water	Drought-tolerant once established; hates wet feet	Wildlife	The monarch butterfly host plant in Hawaii
Soil	Any well-draining soil, even poor and sandy	Caution	Milky sap is toxic — wear gloves, keep from pets/kids
Size	6–12 ft shrub; prune to keep at picking height	Best spot in Hawaii	Hot, dry, sunny — perfect for the leeward side

Care essentials

How do you care for a crown flower plant? Crown flower is one of the easiest shrubs you can grow on O'ahu's dry side: give it full sun and well-draining soil, water regularly for its first few months while roots establish, then back off almost entirely. Mature plants shrug off drought, heat, wind, and poor soil — conditions that kill...

Why are caterpillars eating my crown flower? Because that's the deal with this plant. Crown flower is a milkweed relative and the primary host plant for monarch butterflies (*pulelehua*) in Hawaii — female monarchs lay eggs on it, and the striped caterpillars eat the leaves, sometimes down to stems.

What is the story behind the crown flower in Hawaii? Crown flower — pua kalaunu — was famously the favorite flower of Queen Liliuokalani, Hawai'i's last reigning monarch. The small lavender or white blossoms look like tiny royal crowns, and strung into lei they were her signature.

How do you propagate crown flower? Crown flower grows readily from cuttings and from seed. For cuttings, take a pencil-to-finger-thick section of semi-hard stem about 8–12 inches long, let the milky sap drain and the cut end dry for a day or two, then stick it in barely moist, sandy mix in bright shade.

What pests bother crown flower besides caterpillars? The main freeloader is the oleander aphid — clusters of bright yellow-orange aphids on new growth and flower stalks. A hard blast of water knocks them off, and ladybugs usually keep them in check; avoid systemic insecticides, which poison monarch caterpillars feeding on the same plant.

Quick FAQ

- **Is crown flower poisonous?** Yes — the milky sap contains cardiac glycosides and is toxic to people and pets if ingested, and seriously irritating to eyes and skin. Wear gloves when pruning and wash up after. This is also what makes monarch...
- **Does crown flower attract monarch butterflies?** Yes — it's the primary monarch host plant in Hawaii. Plant crown flower and monarchs will find it, lay eggs, and raise caterpillars on the leaves. Never spray it with pesticides if you want butterflies.
- **How big does a crown flower bush get?** Left alone, 10–12 feet or more. Most people prune it to 5–6 feet to keep flowers at picking height for lei making. It takes hard pruning well.

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Plants by appointment in Wai'anae, O'ahu — email kaalalush@gmail.com to arrange a pickup

Just a little 'ohana nursery — mahalo for growing with us!