Grand Wailea
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Sharing Hawaii's People, Culture and Nature

"E lei no au i ko aloha" I will wear your love as a lei.
(I will cherish your love as a beautiful adornment.)
From Ōlelo No'eau, Hawaiian Proverbs & Poetical Sayings, by Mary Kawena Pukui

February is the month of romance thanks to our Valentine's Day traditions. While hearts, chocolate, and red roses express devotion in the west it is the lei that best symbolizes love in Hawai'i.

The lei has great cultural significance to the Hawaiian people. The wearing of lei is a Polynesian tradition that dates back several centuries. In ancient times a lei was a symbol of a person's rank in society. Today lei are given as an expression of welcome, friendship, and to distinguish the wearer from others on birthdays, graduations, weddings, and other important life events. While Hawaiian flower lei are probably the most well-known, lei can also be made from leaves, feathers, seeds, seaweed, or shells.

If you receive a lei, you should wear it properly which is on your shoulders, with equal parts in front and in back (not like a necklace.) If it has been finished with a bow or a special floral closure, place the embellishment atop your left shoulder (not behind your neck.) It is considered bad form to ask another person for their lei and a lei should never be removed in the presence of the lei giver. And finally, once the flowers have wilted, do not throw your lei in the trash. It should be returned to the place where the flowers were gathered, if possible, or returned to the earth with thoughtful appreciation.

A lei is a treasured symbol of love and affection. It is said that if one makes a lei for another and thinks of that person as they make it, the lei carries those feelings of love. Each lei is hand-woven and represents the thoughtfulness of the lei-maker, therefore it is considered rude to refuse a lei. Although not a traditional Hawaiian custom, today a kiss on the cheek often accompanies the presentation of a lei.

In the metaphorical Hawaiian language, the word "lei," can also mean sweetheart, wife, or husband. What better way to express your deep love for that special someone in your life than with a beautiful lei and a passionate kiss? Valentine's Day aloha to you.

Note: Hawaiian cultural information courtesy of Kahu Lyons Kapi'ioho'okalani Naone, a lineal descendent of a South Maui family well versed in the oral histories and traditions of the region that includes Wailea. Kahu Naone is a member of E Ola Pono, cultural advisors to Grand Wailea.

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