Haʻuoi or ōwī

Jamaican Vervain

Medicinal Applications

We know the medicinal properties of other members of the Verbena family, so we can use this knowledge to teach ourselves about the benefits of Hawaiian vervain. Botanical.com states that “official” vervain is an astringent and that it induces sweating, increases milk production, reduces muscle spasms and liver congestion, and is helpful for ailments such as painful or irregular menses, fevers, ulcers, and pleurisy. These uses are backed up in the Physician’s Desk Reference for Herbal Medicines, which adds that it also has been used for treating burns, malaria, and dislocated bones.

In Hawai‘i, vervain has been used to help heal infections such as staphylococcus: both teas and poultices were used in former times. The leaves have been used for cuts, bruises, and other uses.

Dr. W. Arthur Whistler mentions in his book, Polynesian Herbal Medicine, that the related Verbena litoralis, also known as ha‘uoi and ōwī, was more commonly used as medicine than cayenne vervain. Both plants were used in poultice form for the same medicinal purposes: that is, cuts, bruises, sprains, and rashes.

Culinary Uses

The small purple flowers taste like mushrooms. If you have a few minutes, collect a handful of these pretty little flowers and scatter them over your next salad or omelet as a colorful, tasty garnish.

A similar species, Stachytarpheta jamaicensis, is used to make a stout, dark beer in areas of Central America. It begins as tea, and then sugar and yeast are added. It’s worth a try with our cayenne vervain if you want to use some of your plants instead of mowing them