

What is Poi?

Kuokoa Home Rula
January 1, 1909.

Writer Name

Charles Kahiliaulani Notley and Joseph Moku'hai Poepoe

Mr. Lorrin Andrews in his Hawaiian Dictionary gives the following definition of the word poi: "The paste or pudding which was formerly the chief food of Hawaiians, and is so to a great extent yet. It is made of kalo, sweet potatoes or breadfruit, but mostly of kalo, by baking the above articles in ovens under ground, and afterwards peeling and pounding them with more or less water (bit not much); it is then left in a mass to ferment; after fermentation, it is again worked over with more water until it has the consistency of thick paste. It is eaten cold with fingers."

The learned Hawaiian lexicographer does not give the exact meaning of the word. Poi is a name given to mashed kalo, potato, breadfruit or banana. The kalo (a species of arum esculenam) when cooked, is mashed or pounded with "a stone, specially made for that purpose, until it becomes like a good soft (flour) dough. From that stage it is then reduced to what is called poi. It is only at this stage the word poi is used. When the taro is merely mashed, or pounded into a hard pulpy mass, it is called a pa'i-ai or pa'i-kalo. When it is reduced to a still softer condition, and could be twisted by the fingers, it is then called poi—whether hard or soft (poi pa'a or poi wahī). When the poi is too soft, it is called poi hehe'e.

Our kanaka savant ventures to give his definition of poi. He thinks that it primarily means to gather up; to collect, to pull up; to hold or lift up an article, lest it falls down or spills over. It is analogous to the word hi'i, "to lift up; to carry upon the hips and support with the arms, as a child." An expert

poi pounder will call the attention of an unskillful person when pounding taro, saying: "E poi mai ka 'ai i 'ole e hā'ule ma waho o ka papa." (Gather up the 'ai [root] lest it falls over the board). He found a French definition of the word "poi" in Boniface Mosblech's "Vocabulaire Oceanien—Français, et. cetera" (Paris 1843) to wit, "boullie de taro" (soft taro). That does not give the derivative definition of the word (kalo) any better than Mr. Andrews.

In conclusion, we add the old legend pertaining to the origin of kalo (taro).

Wākea was the husband, and Papa was the wife, and they two were supposed by some ancient Hawaiian traditions, the very first progenitors of the Hawaiian race. They lived on the Ko'olau side of the island of O'ahu, and also at Kalihi. Their first born son was of premature birth. The little fellow died and its body was buried at one end of their house. After a while, from where the child's body was buried a new kind of plant shot up. Nobody knows what it was. Finally, green leaves appeared. Wākea called the leaves "Lau-kapalili" (the quivering leaves) and the long stalk or stem of the plant was called "Hā-loa" (long stalk or stem). The plant was finally called by Wākea as "Hāloa." The word "Hāloa" afterwards became "Kaloa," and it finally becomes "Kalo." The second son of Wākea was named "Hāloa" in remembrance of the first Hāloa or the kalo plant. And the mountain of Kualoa, Ko'olaupoko, O'ahu is called the "Pali kapu o Hāloa," or the "Sacred mountain of Hāloa."

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| 01 Tsurunoko | 26 'Apuwai |
| 02 Akado | 27 'Apu |
| 03 Iliuua | 28 Pi'i 'Ali'i |
| 04 Bun-long-woo | 29 Pa'akai |
| 05 Āweu | 30 Moana |
| 06 Mana 'Ulu | 31 Akuugawai |
| 07 Mana 'Ōpelu | 32 Nāwao |
| 08 Mana Uliuli | 33 'Ula'ula Kūmū |
| 09 Mana 'Ula'ula | 34 'Ulaula Moano |
| 10 Mana Lauloa | 35 Hāpu'u |
| 11 Mana Ke'oke'o | 36 Lihilihimōlina |
| 12 Piko Lehua Apei | 37 Mana 'Ele'ele |
| 13 Piko 'Ula'ula | 38 Moi 'Ula'ula |
| 14 Piko Kea | 39 Black Magic |
| 15 Piko Ke'oke'o | 40 Niue 'Ula'ula |
| 16 Piko Uua | 41 'O'opukai |
| 17 Piko Uliuli | 42 Manini Uliuli |
| 18 Piko 'Ele'ele | 43 Nihopu'u |
| 19 'Elepaio hā kea | 44 Niue Uliuli |
| 20 Uahiapēle | 45 'Ohe |
| 21 Manapiko | 46 Lehua Maoli |
| 22 Tahitian | 47 Lehua Ke'oke'o |
| 23 Kāt Uliuli | 48 'Apowale |
| 24 Kāt 'Ala | 49 Wehiwa |
| 25 Kāt Kea | 50 Kū'oho |

