



Present

Do Not Cultivate

FALSE AWA

Piper auritum



BIISC

Description: Soft-wooded shrub, 3-19' tall, forming large clumps of upright canes

Don't confuse with these look alike:



Forest and Kim Starr

Awa



Forest and Kim Starr

Black Pepper



Forest and Kim Starr

Leaves: Light green, large, heart shaped to oblong, with a distinct central vein.
Licorice scented

Stems: Cane like stems with swollen nodes at intervals



Forest and Kim Starr

Flowers: White spike shaped flowers, 1-4" long, held above foliage



Forest and Kim Starr

SHRUB

FALSE AWA

Piper auritum

Origin: South America to Mexico
HWRA Score: 15

Family: Piperaceae

Big Island Habitat: Moist lowland habitats

Description: A fast growing, soft-wooded shrub from 3-19 feet tall, with upright or sprawling cane like stems and swollen nodes at intervals. The leaves are large, light green, heart shaped to oval and fragrant when crushed. The plant produces numerous white spike-shaped flowers over much of the year. False awa is also called hoja santa and yerba santa.

Impacts: False awa aggressively invades disturbed lowland areas forming thick stands, replacing native vegetation. It yields a vastly inferior product if mistakenly mixed with true awa.

Dispersal Mechanism: Although false awa rarely produces seed, it spreads readily from stem and root shoots. Even small pieces of the plant or root can grow rapidly into new stands.

Cultivation: False awa has been occasionally cultivated for its fragrant leaves used in Meso-American cooking and medicine, and perhaps mistakenly for true awa. This aggressive, invasive plant should not be cultivated in Hawai'i.

Don't confuse with:

- **Awa** (*Piper methysticum*) The veins of true awa radiate from a central point at the base of the leaf. The veins of false awa extend from a central vein which runs the length of the leaf. False awa leaves are lighter green and generally larger than true awa leaves.
- **Black Pepper** (*Piper nigrum*) This sparsely cultivated vine has similar leaves but lacks false awa's cane-like stalks.

SHRUB