



May Day is Lei Day in Beautiful Hawai'i

May 1, celebrated around the world as a workers' holiday, and in England and parts of Europe as a festival of spring, in the Hawaiian Islands has been known for some four generations as Lei Day. The lei, known the world over, is a symbol of Aloha. Great care is taken into the gathering of the materials to make a lei. After the materials are gathered, they are prepared and then fashioned into a lei. As this is done, the mana (or spirit) of the creator of the lei is sewn or woven into it. Therefore, when you give a lei, you are giving a part of you. Likewise, as you receive a lei, you are receiving a part of the creator of the lei.

1927 gave birth to the idea of Lei Day. Poet laureate Don Blanding thought that Hawai'i should have a day set aside to celebrate and recognize the custom of giving and receiving a lei. While working at the Honolulu Star Bulletin, Don discussed the idea with "Kama'aina Kolumn" columnist Grace Tower Warren. She enthusiastically embraced the idea and suggested that the day should be May Day and coined the phrase May Day is Lei Day. Inspired by their zeal, Leonard "Red" and Ruth Hawk, a musician, composed May Day is Lei Day in Hawai'i. This song resonates throughout every Lei Day celebration in the State of Hawai'i.



The first Lei Day was in 1928 and celebrated at the Bank of Hawai'i in downtown Honolulu. The Honolulu Star Bulletin stated that the throng of people "taxed the capacity of the building." From keiki to kūpuna, kama'āina to malihini - it was a day celebrated throughout the islands. In 1928, the first lei queen was Miss Nina Bowman. Mayor Charles Arnold crowned Lei Queen Nina Bowman in Honolulu. She is the sister to Kent "K. K. Kaumanua" Bowman. In 1929, May 1 of each year was proclaimed as "May Day is Lei Day in Hawai'i," by Governor Wallace R. Farrington – to be observed "by all true friends of Hawai'i." It is a day of celebration – not a state holiday

["May Day is Lei Day in Hawai'i."](#) This link will take you to Lei Day celebrations on each of the Islands of Hawai'i.

Blanding explained the origin of the Hawaiian holiday in his book, *Hula Moons*, as follows:

Along in the latter part of 1927 I had an idea; not that that gave me a headache, but it seemed such a good one that I had to tell someone about it, so I told the editors of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, the paper on which I worked. They agreed that it was a good idea and that we ought to present it to the public, which we proceeded to do. It took hold at once and resulted in something decidedly beautiful.

. . . The custom of weaving and wearing flower leis originated with the Hawaiians so long ago that they have no record of its beginning. When tourists discovered Hawaii, they loved the charming gesture and they spread the word of it until the lei became known around the world.

. . . Hawai`i observed all the mainland holidays as well as those of several of the immigrant nationalities in the Islands. But there was no day that was peculiarly and completely Hawaii's own; that is none that included all the polyglot population there.

So, the bright idea that I presented was, "Why not have a Lei Day?" Let everyone wear a lei and give a lei. Let it be a day of general rejoicing over the fact that one lived in a Paradise. Let it be a day for remembering old friends, renewing neglected contacts, with the slogan "Aloha," allowing that flexible word to mean friendliness on that day."