



“This 12-year-old tree is called ulu or breadfruit and will need to be cut down. See how the roots are rotten? This is the third tree I have needed to cut down in 30 years,” he says. Joe’s sensitive his breadfruit tree makes me wonder if our fisherman guide is channeling the horticultural skills of an ancient Polynesian gardener.

Joe has to cut spaces through the overhead foliage, so the sun reaches the underplants and the PV panels on the roofs of the two-story buildings. No high-rises on this sandy cove.

He helps us distinguish between the Triangle palms, Fish-tail palms, the false palms, the Traveler’s palms, the Foxtail palms and the Manila palms from the Philippines. As an aside, he points out one of the trees he planted 12 years ago in the decaying remains of an old coconut tree. The new growth has never needed fertilizer. I recognize a 15-foot tall version of the poinsettia plant we have in little pots at home.

Joe directs a pointed finger across the landscape to Spa-

ghetti, Cup and Saucer, Prince Edward, and Indian Blanket – all 40-year-old hedges that were in the ground before he started to work at Napili Kai Beach Resort. He regards the sturdy bushes kindly, almost as if they are respected elders.

Flowers are arranged by colour all over the property. You can bring Joe a flower from anywhere and he can tell you where it is from and the history of the plant.

Joe claims to have 65 of the 70 colour-combinations varieties of hibiscus. The biggest brilliant yellow hibiscus on the property is called the Hula Girl – nearly 2.5-metres tall. He plants things and if they don’t do well within two weeks, he moves them. His plants invariably turn into champions.

He takes us past the “breast cancer shuffleboard area” where all the hibiscus flowers are pink. We ogle hanging heliconias, snowflake hibiscus, and a lace hibiscus – with a wash of tiny little holes in all the leaves.

Joe’s appreciation for the artistry of horticulture is inspiring. You cannot help but soak up his love of flora and fauna. His garden forms the heart of a business started 60 years ago by three Canadians. A preponderance of magnificent patches of skunk cabbage with luxurious clumps of leaves and large yellow blossoms lit up a peaceful ocean-side landscape and beckoned the trio to dream of creating a Maui resort. The resort is still 25 per cent Canadian-owned today.

I chatted with a young mother of three boys who told me she was a landscape developer and has come here with her family since she was a child. She says her holiday is never complete without a long, plant-based chat with Joe.

At sunset, I run into Joe as he is preparing for a private luau for one of the staff who is retiring after 30 years. He has offered to cook the feast to honour his colleague. Joe’s wife joins him under the breadfruit tree, to help with the overnight task of steaming meat in a modern day imu (earth oven). I ask how she found a husband who could excel at fishing, gardening and cooking such a feast. She tells me her husband of 32 years is a “good provider.” Joe Ahpuck’s diversity of skills are rooted in a primal Hawaiian past, where resourcefulness was king.

Joe places banana and ti leaves on the bottom of the outdoor cooker. He explains they are for “aromatic effect.”

By 8:30 the next morning, some 12 hours later, the meat is cooked, and Joe and two colleagues open the heavy tinfoil parcels. Juice runs. The smell of cooked roasts permeates the warm morning air. Meat falls away from the bones and the large serving trays fill up under deft hands.

Joe extends a plate of meat, offering samples, and looks at me with a face full of satisfaction. “It doesn’t get any better than this,” he says. |

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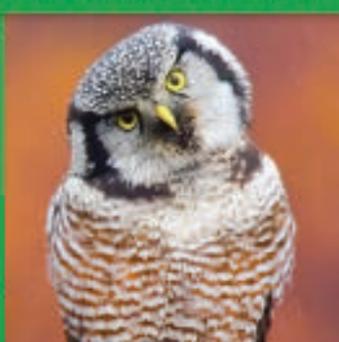
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