



## ***What do Christmas Trees and Invasive Species Have in Common?***

**A: Shipped Christmas trees can carry dangerous new invasive species to our islands.**

Ruth Bennett, VP PMKCA

The holidays are a time for joy and celebration. We come together with our ohana in homes graced by lights and color – and sometimes with a decorated tree purchased at a big store’s lot of shipped mainland trees.

*But, for our island folks who are charged with fighting invasive species, the holidays are a time for anxiety, effort, and extra vigilance.*

Every holiday season, tens of thousands of Christmas trees are packed into containers and shipped to Hawai’i. These shipments almost always bring a few dangerous animals, plants, or disease-causing pathogens to our islands. Little or no inspections are made of the trees before they leave the mainland, and Hawaii’s agents in charge of checking for invasive species are unable to check every “shrink-wrapped” tree in every container.

Our islands get unwelcome *presents*, hanging on these *container trees*, that cause us grief for years to come.

***So, what’s the alternative to a tree shipped from the mainland?***

There are at least two alternatives, and I’ve tried them both:



*Branches of Strawberry Guava make a lovely “tree” when arranged in a 5-gallon bucket.*

The innovative alternative: Create your own “tree”! Strawberry Guava is an invasive plant species that overwhelms the gulches near my home. Their glossy leaves and red fruit look festive and cutting them down is NOT a problem.

One year, for a holiday party, I cut about 10-12 branches and arranged them in a 5-gallon bucket, then decorated them with lights and colorful items from my home and garden. Beautiful, festive – and FREE!



*My locally grown Portuguese Cypress Tree from Hāmākua Christmas Tree Forest.*

The traditional alternative: Purchase your tree LOCALLY! There are Christmas tree farms all over the Big Island, and my favorite is here on the Hāmākua Coast. The [Hāmākua Christmas Tree Forest](#) in Ninole grows fresh, lovely, and competitively priced trees of all sizes.

The owners have chosen to grow tree species that are well suited to our island, and they maintain the trees and their farm to high standards so that buyers may have confidence they are NOT bringing home Little Fire Ants or other invasive species.

So, if you love the look of a holiday tree but don't want to contribute to our island's severe problems with invasives by buying a potentially infested mainland tree, check out a locally-grown tree farm – or get creative, make your own “tree” out of an invasive plant in a 5-gallon bucket!



**Watch for the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle (2" big!) and its larvae (big and ugly!) kill palms, bananas, taro, and other plants – and they have just been found on the Big Island. Credit: BIISC.org**

## **Invasive Species Alert: Dangerous Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle (CRB) recently found on the Big Island!**

The voracious larvae of this large black one-horned beetle were recently found *for the first time* on our island in a decayed palm stump in Waikoloa. The

Big Island Invasive Species Committee ([biisc.org](http://biisc.org)), “first responders” in the fight against invasive species, considers this pest to be a VERY SERIOUS threat to our island’s palms, bananas, taro, and other plants. Finding and eradicating any CRBs on our island has become a high priority for all of us who are concerned about invasive species.

The CRB has already devastated palms and other plants on O’ahu. The adult beetle is quite large – 2+ inches – and has a single horn protruding from its forehead. The grubs (larvae) are also large and can be found in dying plant stems, *and in bags of mulch!!*

BIISC has put out a [guide to recognizing the CRB](#) on their website and asks that we all be on the lookout for them and for damaged palms and other plants. They would be really bad news if they became established on our island.

So – enjoy your holiday festivities with locally grown Christmas trees or other decorative plant material. But, *please*, also inform yourselves about the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle. Who knows? A holiday horror story... maybe one of those mainland Christmas trees brought the CRB here. And today, maybe one of those tree-stuffed containers is bringing the next horrific, unwelcome holiday invader!

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## **On a different subject – Property Taxes!**

Property owners in agricultural communities like ours often have a Non-Dedicated Agricultural Classification which may provide some tax relief for practicing agriculture on their properties. There is a critical deadline approaching by which any property owner must apply to change their classification – **December 31, 2023**.

There are good reasons why property owners might consider making changes – they are contemplating starting some kind of agriculture, or they are considering abandoning their agricultural classification.

PMKCA has devoted a page on its [PMKCA.org](http://PMKCA.org) website to discussing the details of this important decision. You’ll find a link to the information on the main menu under “Interests”. We have also provided an interactive worksheet that you can download to run real-data calculations based on your own property and tax situation.

Besides *looking out for* the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle, now is the time to *look into* the factors that might affect your next tax bill (2024-2025). Missing the December 31 deadline will close the door for changing your agricultural tax status.

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## **Upcoming PMKCA Meetings & Events:**

### **Board of Directors Meeting**

**January 11, 2024 - 6PM**

***Location: to be determined***

All members with interests or concerns are welcome to attend. Contact any Board member for meeting details.

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***Join PMKCA or Renew Your Membership for 2024***

***Any dues payments received in December 2023 will be credited to 2024.***

PMKCA dues remain at only \$20 per calendar year and help support so many great community activities. Click the "Visit PMKCA's Website" link below and choose Membership.

***We offer a PayPal option, or mail a check made out to  
PMKCA, PO Box 408, Pa'auilo, HI 96776, or pay in cash at any PMKCA event.***

**Visit PMKCA's Website**

**Pa'auilo Mauka Kalopa Community Association, P.O. Box 408, Pa'auilo, HI 96776**  
*(Please note that we may not be able to read and respond quickly to replies.)*