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## ALUMNI PROFILE

### Eric Tanouye, Class VII



### Stop and smell the ... anthuriums?

The future of Hawai'i anthuriums seems bright, if not rosy. That's because the floral industry mainstay is in the midst of a makeover. White, lavender and green anthuriums already are changing the reputation of the traditionally red and yellow flower. And new varieties under development such as a recently released white and green "Centennial" version, a dark purple anthurium and even a fragrant "Princess Aiko" variety could change the flower's future. These new plants are among nearly 40 anthurium varieties of varying shapes and colors pioneered by the University of Hawai'i. They promise to keep Hawai'i. Hawai'i flower growers competitive in an increasingly global market. However, products such as scented anthuriums are still possibly four years away from commercial availability.

"We can see the benefit, but you can't rush good things," said Eric Tanouye, general manager for Hawai'i's largest anthurium grower, Green Point Nurseries in Hilo. Green Point is helping UH research the scented anthurium, which is called "Princess Aiko" in honor of the daughter of Japan's crown prince and princess. It's expected to be the first strongly fragrant anthurium to reach the market.

"It's wonderful," Tanouye said of the flower. "It has kind of a tropical fruity scent." While traditionally unscented, anthuriums remain popular flowers in part because of their long vase life of a month or more. Anthuriums generate about \$5 million in farm sales annually and are the No. 1 cut flower within Hawai'i's \$100 million floriculture and nursery product industry. The latest variety is the so-called "Centennial" anthurium, which was released by UH this month. The green and white coloration of the flower is representative of the university's colors. The flower, which changes color from white to green over time, was named in honor of the university's 100th anniversary. It's about three years away from large-scale commercial production, Tanouye said. The pink, tulip-shaped "Princess Aiko" will be commercially available soon after "Centennial," Tanouye said. The fragrant anthurium has been under development since the late 1990s. It traces its roots to species located in the jungles of Central America, according to UH horticulture professor Adelheid Kuehnle, who is the project's principal researcher. Though novel, the flower has one potential drawback — the fragrance for cut anthuriums does not last more than a few days, Kuehnle said. However, the fragrance can last for two weeks if the plant remains potted.

Currently Hawai'i growers cannot export potted plants to Japan, which is among the most lucrative anthurium markets for the state. State officials have spent years urging Japan to allow such imports, and that effort could pay off as early as this summer, said Tanouye. Potted anthurium exports could further boost business for Green Point, which already sells 2.5 million anthurium stems annually. Exports of potted anthuriums also could ultimately make sales of fragrant anthuriums in Japan more economically viable, said Matthew Loke, administrator of the state Agricultural Development Division. The market potential of a fragrant anthurium seems "very, very powerful," Loke said. "If this is doable, think about it — we could have different smells" for different anthuriums.

Potential anthurium scents already discovered range from rotten fish to sweet floral, cinnamon and minty aromas, Kuehnle said. Despite the introduction of new colors of anthuriums during the past five years, the most popular remains the traditional red and yellow version, Tanouye said. He hopes that someday bright yellow and even blue anthuriums will be developed.

From the Honolulu Advertiser, March 2007