

# Holiday gifts and trimmings not always eco-friendly

## Kia'i Moku

By Joylynn Paman



'Tis the season to be jolly fa la la la la la. .... 'Tis also the season to exchange gifts between family and friends, to select that perfect Christmas tree for your home, and to ring in the new year. During this gift-giving season, it is also wise to be cautious of pests which may ruin your holiday cheer. Intentionally or not, invasive insects, animals, seeds, and plants may be transported through the islands via presents in the mail, the exchange of floral arrangements, and even within nostalgically fragrant Christmas trees.

Last month, Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) inspectors conducted a routine inspection upon the arrival of thousands of Christmas trees from the mainland. They discovered that several shipment containers transported a harmful wasp species. The Ger-

man yellow jacket (*Vespula germanica*) is not currently found in Hawai'i and if it had not been detected early, it could have wreaked havoc in our islands. It could become established in homes and yards, threatening the quality of life of residents and visitors. By preying on native Hawaiian insects, the yellow jacket could also jeopardize pollination of native plants.

With over 150,000 Christmas trees being imported into Hawai'i this year, please do your part and inspect your Christmas tree for hitchhiking bugs, insects, etc. You can easily do this by vigorously shaking your tree. This will cause loose needles and other matter to dislodge. Inspect the fallen material and if you find something that looks out of the ordinary, please call the Hawai'i Pest Hotline at 643-PEST.

Likewise, pests can make their way to your home through the mail. While many mail parcels arrive free of harmful pests, there is a chance that spiders, ants, and other insects may come along for the ride. Inspect your mail ordered presents

thoroughly. If you find something unusual or of concern, call 643-PEST.

It may also be tempting to mail someone you love a new plant or animal from a catalog or from the internet. This may seem like a good idea at first, but these catalogs and websites often sell plants and animals that could become serious pests in our state or are illegal. For example, items such as pampas grass, fountain grasses, and reptiles should not be purchased. To be on the safe side, check with HDOA prior to purchasing those mail order gifts. It's better to be safe than sorry when it comes to invasive species.

And we can't forget about the beautiful flowers that are in bloom this season and shared between friends and families throughout the state. Poinsettias, floral wreaths, and flower arrangements to name a few. As wonderful as these can be, it is important that you carefully inspect them. Small stinging nettle caterpillars, coqui frogs and their eggs, thrips, and little fire ants may be lodged within your arrangement. We have already seen some of these invasive species

make their way to Maui via plants and plant material this year. Let's be sure that we are not making it easier for them to travel into and within Maui County.

This holiday season, let's all do our part to share the aloha spirit with friends and family and not share invasive plants and animals which could present a major challenge for the new year. From all of us at the Maui Invasive Species Committee, we'd like to wish you and your family a safe, happy, and "pest-free" holiday season.

• "Kia'i Moku" (or "Guarding the Island") is prepared by the Maui Invasive Species Committee to provide information on protecting the island from invasive plants and animals that can threaten the island's environment, economy and quality of life. Joylynn Paman, is public relations and education specialist with the MISC.