



United States Department of Agriculture

# Tropical Nursery Manual

## A Guide to Starting and Operating a Nursery for Native and Traditional Plants



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Tropical ecosystems and agroecosystems are vital, life-giving landscapes. They are home to diverse plants, animals, and people in a range of climatic, geologic, cultural, and environmental contexts. Protecting and revitalizing these systems involves planting native and traditional species, and sowing awareness of these plants among people. Tropical nurseries are a key link in restoring tropical ecosystems and agroecosystems, and can integrate goals of economic resiliency, cultural renewal, and more.

This *Tropical Nursery Manual* serves people who are starting or operating a nursery for native and traditional species in the tropics. Key concepts, principles, and processes are presented, based on proven practices and the best science available. Understanding these concepts and principles will make it easier to operate a nursery successfully, and to meet project objectives in the field. Topics covered include nursery planning, plant propagation, crop production, plant care, outplanting, and ongoing learning.

This manual also recognizes that every nursery is unique. Local conditions and ingenuity, integrated with the information in this manual, combine to cultivate high-quality plants with the best chance to survive and flourish into the future.

*“A very useful and urgently needed tool for native plant growers and nursery managers in the tropics. It highlights the challenges faced when dealing with tropical species no one else has propagated.”*

— **Christian Torres-Santana**

USDA Forest Service, International Institute of Tropical Forestry,  
San Juan, Puerto Rico

*“This manual not only has great, detailed information on how to manage the small-scale, highly diverse nurseries for native and traditional tropical plants, but it also includes inspirational case studies from nursery practitioners working in the field today.”*

— **J.B. Friday**

Tropical Forestry & Agroforestry Extension, University of Hawai‘i, Hilo, Hawai‘i

*“The Tropical Nursery Manual is very complete, covering thoroughly all aspects of nursery techniques in the tropics. But, it also provides clear ideas about how to solve arising problems. The attractive presentation with the excellent visual material guarantees an easy understanding for practical application. I am sure that this manual sets a new standard in the subject of nursery management in the tropics and will accompany many nursery managers and foresters in the years to come.”*

— **Laszlo Pancel**

GIZ Advisor, Editor, *Tropical Forestry Handbook Editions I & II*,  
La Libertad, El Salvador

*“This manual is a wonderful resource for people who want to do the best job they can growing tropical trees. The authors provide helpful information, taking into account many types of situations and giving the reader ideas about how to solve specific issues, as well as the idea that one can be innovative and find solutions to meet any challenge.”*

— **Jill Wagner**

Future Forests Nursery, Kailua-Kona, Hawai‘i

