

# Odes to Nature

Barbara Tinius finds joy and fulfillment through the art of ikebana.

**I**kebana is defined as “the Japanese art of flower arrangement,” but materials, both dried and fresh, also include vines, leaves and branches with buds, berries, fruits, seeds and moss.

“Availability of materials is the first hurdle of ikebana,” says instructor **BARBARA TINIUS**. “Getting enough of them to teach an arrangement to a whole class is the second. I occasionally get things from friends, and I have greens in my yard, but I buy most of the materials for my classes.”

Tinius, who moved to Kailua in 2008 and began teaching ikebana in 2015, holds the title of *Junkatoku*, representing the 15th out of 18 certification levels in the Ikenobo School, which, dating from the 15th century, is the oldest in Japan. She shares her knowledge and passion for the art with students in Kailua and ‘Aiea, inspiring greater appreciation for the beauty and subtleties of nature one elegant arrangement at a time.

Introduced to ikebana around 1990 while living in Japan, Tinius has since been on a journey of learning, practice and certification, taught by instructors in Japan, Baltimore, Austria and Germany as work for the Department of Defense sent her across the globe. She initially took classes at the Ohara School in Tokyo. When she moved to Baltimore in 1992, the teacher she found was in the Ikenobo School, so she switched schools.

“Back then I didn’t know the differences between schools or even that there were different schools,” Tinius says. “I started learning about them and found out that no matter the school, ikebana might look simple, but it can be very intricate and require a lot of thought. Often the simpler it looks, the harder it is to do.”



In Ikenobo there are three general arranging styles: The older style, *Rikka*, has nine basic branches; *Jiyuka* is freestyle with no set patterns; and *Shoka* has three basic branches. *Shoka*, as was explained to Tinius, can be seen as representing the past, present and future. The tallest branch is the father (young, strong, tall and erect); the one that leans to the left is the grandfather (weathered and bent with age and exposure to the elements); and the smallest (usually flowers in the front) represents the son.

As students progress, they might use more lines and techniques without moving on to more difficult styles. “There’s always more to learn, from styles to specific variations,” Tinius says. “With experience, you can see how plants naturally grow and how to use them that way — to cut away the excess and bring out the beauty there.”

When Tinius begins an arrangement, she either starts with a sketch of an idea or creates more organically based on what is available at the florist or even in her yard. Early on, her instructors encouraged her to sketch arrangements and note materials, so along the way she also honed her drawing skills.

“If I’m planning something for a specific event, there’s sketching involved, such as one I did for Palm Sunday at church,” Tinius says. “I planned how to use palms and other things to complement them. I also used pussy willow because in Germany that’s what they use since they can’t get palms.” Other times she goes with whatever elements work best together, always keeping flexible and having options in mind.







Tinius continues to refine her craft, attending workshops locally and in Japan, Austria and the Mainland, striving for additional Ikenobo certifications. She regularly completes arrangements for the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i and Kuakini Medical Center. But most of all she continues to be inspired by learning and sharing this profound and joyful art.

"As I've gotten better at ikebana, I find it to be Zen-like," Tinius says. "It's very calming to sit and focus. I tell my students to relax and have fun with it." 🍃

For more information about the Ikenobo School's styles of arranging, visit [www.ikenobo.jp/english/about/style.html](http://www.ikenobo.jp/english/about/style.html).

Barbara Tinius teaches a one-hour beginning and intermediate ikebana class one Saturday a month at Keolumana United Methodist Church, 1425 Keolu Drive (her twice-monthly classes at New Town Estates Community Association's recreation center in 'Aiea are full).

Cost is \$20 per class, including materials, but if you haven't done ikebana before, you'll likely need to spend more than \$100 for a vase, scissors, *kenzan* (pin frog) and lessonbook to get started. You can join the class at any time. Advance registration is required. She is open to adding an advanced class for a minimum of three students who have at least a Level 5 Ikenobo certificate.

We'd love to meet other Kailua residents who have an interesting hobby, skill or talent. Would that be you — or does someone come to mind? Please email us at [gokailuamagazine@gmail.com](mailto:gokailuamagazine@gmail.com).

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# Ikebana 101

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Exactly how and when ikebana was born is not clear, although some scholars trace its beginnings to the sixth century when Buddhism was introduced to Japan from China. It was customary for monks to make offerings of flowers to Buddha during their rituals. As the decades passed, ikebana spread from temples to homes, and by the 16th century, it was common to see floral adornments in families' *tokonoma*, an alcove that was reserved to display art. Today, there are reputedly some 3,000 different ikebana schools in Japan, the largest and best-known being Ikenobo, Ohara and Sogetsu.

Each school teaches its own style of arranging (often a hybrid), but some common features apply. Here are three of the things that Barbara Tinius says are important for ikebana novices to keep in mind.

- Your container — whether it be a vase, bowl, box, basket, dish, jar, teapot or cup — affects what you decide to create. Does its shape complement your concept? Does the color match or clash with the colors of your materials? Proper proportion is also crucial: The container shouldn't be so small that your arrangement overwhelms it, and it shouldn't be so large that it diverts attention from your work of art.
- Open space is a key element in ikebana, just as pauses add drama to music and speech. Emptiness has shape, allows materials to breathe and creates motion in a design. Also, vertical arrangements can be perceived as being stiff while lines that slant and curve add movement and soften the appearance.
- Asymmetrical balance sounds contradictory, but it actually results in an arrangement that looks complete and is more natural, active and interesting than perfect alignment. For example, use odd numbers of flowers, place materials on one side of the container or set them on opposite sides at different levels or in different amounts.