

PLUMERIAS

Plumerias are one of the most exotic plants grown mostly all over the world in places where there are warm temperatures. They are loved due to their fragrance and colour. They were first found in the southern forest regions of Mexico in the mid-19th century. The first plant was brought over to the Hawaiian islands in 1860 by Wilhelm Hillebrand, a German physician and a botanist.

In India Plumerias are known as temple trees or Buddha trees. Buddhists said they resembled “Immortality” because one can snap a branch off and grow it as a cutting producing beautiful flowers from the severed branch. It is also called “Frangipani” and Champa in Hindi.

Plumeria is a genus of flowering plant in the dogbane family Apocynaceae. Though it is native to countries such as Mexico, Central America, Colombia, Guyana, Venezuela, Brazil, it has been growing in India since ages as per references found in scriptures.

Description

They are relatively small plant trees growing about 5 to 6 mts in ht, but their width can be as wide as their height. They have a well behaved root system which makes them ideal for home gardens and growing in pots. They are great survivors with drought, heat, neglect, insect and pest attack. They have gnarled branches and long leaves with distinctive flowers in huge bunch. The bark is dark grey green and scaly in appearance. These scales are the result of shedding leaves in winter. These scales are different in different species and help in determining the species. The branches have a swollen appearance, leaves are dark green on upper side and lighter colour on lower side. It oozes milky sap from every part of tree when it has a cut. The milky sap is poisonous to both humans and animals. Flowers are borne in clusters at the end of branches. They are straight or hanging and have distinctive fragrance either sweet or spicy. The petals are waxy, rounded or pointed and coloured centres. The central colour varies from species to species and is usually yellow or orange.

Varieties

There are more than 500 varieties ranging from pinks to violets, crimson to red and yellow to white. Each species of Plumeria bears differently shaped leaves and their form and growth habits are distinct.

PLUMERIA OBTUSA - A mainly ever green tree except for few months with spreading branches and rounded dome. It is also called Singapore but is originally from Colombia. It grows up to 8 meters and spreads to 4 meters. tubular, fragrant flowers from summers to autumn.

PLUMERIA RUBRA - (Variation Plumeria Acutifolia or red Plumeria) It is native to Mexico, Central America and Venezuela. It is a deciduous tree, spreading with sparse branches. It produces fragrant flowers with 5 minimal spreading petals ranging from yellow to pink depending upon form or cultural. It too blooms from summer to autumn.

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Plumeria Alba It is sometimes called the West Indian jasmine tree. It grows as a vase-shaped tree and can become quite large, sometimes reaching a mature height of 40 feet. Its leaves are also especially big, up to 12 inches long, and its white, yellow-centered flowers appear from spring onwards. Their fragrance is especially sweet and strong, making these trees useful near patios, porches and windows.

Plumeria Stenopetala Usually grows with a single trunk and develops an overall shape similar to a candelabrum, with many branches that spread out to form a wide canopy about 25 feet tall at maturity and usually deciduous, dropping its leaves during winter in most areas. This tree has long, narrow leaves and fragrant white flowers whose five petals are long, thin and slightly curling, producing a flower that resembles an elongated star. Like most plumerias, it can do well in a large container, provided the soil is well-drained.

Plumeria Pudica It is one of the ever blooming types with non deciduous ever green leaves. Leaves of plumeria pudica have an elongated shape and glossy, dark-green color.

Method Of Growing Plumeria These trees are tropical and therefore must have conditions at least approximating tropical/subtropical in order to flourish. Plumeria do best in full sun with at least a half day's sun exposure to bloom properly. They do well when potted in an appropriate size pot to the size of the tree in well drained soil. The appropriate sized pot acts as a ballast for the tree so that it does not blow over in a breeze.

Plant in well drained soil.

Make sure the drain holes in the pot are not closed, so excess water can drain.

Soil mix should have porous drain free soil having soil, sand, compost and neem khali.

Plumerias can be grown from cuttings. Take a cutting also of about 12 to 18 inches and dry it for a week then put it in the soil for rooting. Do not water Plumeria while they are rooting. The rooting process should take 5 to 6 weeks in late spring and summer. Rooting Plumeria is successful at minimum temperatures of 60 degrees Fahrenheit. One may use rooting hormone, however in most cases it is not necessary. Dark red and Singapore are the most difficult to root.

Begin slight watering of a rooting plumeria when the leaves are well developed.

Once the leaf head has fully developed you can water normally. Regardless of popular opinion plumeria likes water but not too much. Watering schedule depends on the time of the year. In hot weather more water is necessary to keep the foliage lush green. When dormant during winters, (December to February/March), water less frequently. Begin watering and fertilizing at the first sign of the growth tip coming to life.

Weekly applications of insecticidal soap can control white flies. Established plumeria trees growing in the ground can tolerate low water conditions (Xeriscape).

Plumeria can be grown from seeds too. Plumeria grown from seed does not necessarily hold true to the parent. On an average, a seedling will not bloom until it is 3 years old.

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Plants should be fertilized every fifteen days.

Conclusion

Plumeria is a Genus of flowering plant in the dogbane family apocynaceae. Though they are native to Mexico and Central America, they have existed in India since ages as per references found in scriptures. Plumeria is blessed with wide ranging colour of flowers and requires very little maintenance. Its adaptability to almost all situations and its unabated fertility through seeds and cuttings, make it very popular.