

# Plumeria (Frangipani) Cultivation

## Description

The genus *Plumeria* contains seven species of tropical flowering shrubs and small trees indigenous to Central/South America and belonging to the plant family Apocynaceae. There are many named varieties/cultivars of *Plumeria*, most of which are forms or hybrids of two species: *Plumeria obtusa* and *Plumeria rubra*. *Plumerias* are much valued for their fragrant, colourful flowers which are often used for leis in Hawaii and throughout Polynesia.

## Rooting the Cuttings

*Plumeria* cuttings are susceptible to rotting during the rooting process. It is advisable to dip the cutting in softwood rooting hormone containing an anti-fungicide prior to planting. The media should be reasonably sterile (no topsoil or compost) and have excellent drainage. A mixture of 2/3 Perlite to 1/3 peat moss is often used, but the potted cutting can be easily knocked over due to the light weight of this media. To overcome this problem, we recommend adding a small amount of coarse sand or pumice to the rooting mix; the extra weight will provide stability while the cutting is rooting. It is also important that the rooting media is not too heavy, as the new roots are brittle and can break off during the transplanting process once the cutting has rooted. The cutting should be potted in a 4" pot and placed in a warm, sunny area and lightly watered once a week. After 4 to 6 weeks, a gentle tug on the cutting will confirm that rooting has taken place. Rooted cuttings can then be transplanted into a more nutritious media.

## Potting Media

When the cutting is firmly rooted, it is ready to be transplanted into a richer media. The roots will be brittle and the cutting must be un-potted gently in order to avoid breakage. *Plumeria* are not particular in regards to the exact composition of the potting media, but two requirements must always be kept in mind when mixing the media: (a) the media must have excellent drainage, and (b) the media should be rich in nutrients. Examples of suitable mixes:

- (1) 1/4 Perlite, 1/4 Coir or peat moss, 1/4 composted Steer manure or compost, 1/4 pumice or fine lava rock.
- (2) 3/4 commercial Cactus mix, 1/4 manure or compost.

Note: A small amount of horticultural charcoal can be added to any of the above mixes in order to improve drainage. Also, after a sufficient amount of media has been placed in the bottom of the pot, 2-3 tablespoons of bone meal or blood meal can be mixed into this media before the rooted *plumeria* is placed in the pot.

## Location & Light Requirements

In Canada and the northern USA, *plumeria* can be placed outdoors in the spring, once the night-time temperatures are consistent at 10 Celsius, with an average minimum daytime temperature of approximately 15 Celsius. Whether grown indoors or outdoors, *plumerias* always prefer a sunny location and can be placed in areas exposed to full sun all day. In the Pacific northwest, it is important that *plumerias* are not subjected to steady rain over several days, as this can lead to rotting. If these weather conditions occur, the plants can be left outside but should be moved under an overhang to prevent saturation of the potting media with water. *Plumerias* should be moved indoors by mid-September, depending upon local conditions.

## Watering

Over-watering is a common mistake when growing *plumeria*. Although the plants have a lush, tropical appearance, *plumeria* culture is similar to cactus cultivation rather than tropical houseplants. When in doubt, don't water. A thirsty *plumeria* will quickly recover, but a plant afflicted with rotting roots due to over-watering can be difficult to salvage. During the growing season of April through to September, a once-weekly watering is usually sufficient, unless the plant is pot-bound. The media should be allowed to dry out slightly between waterings.

## Dormancy & Winter Care

Although there are evergreen varieties of *plumeria* (ie: 'Singapore White'), most varieties are deciduous. In Canada, *plumerias* will usually drop their leaves in November. This dormant period helps to trigger flower bud production in the following spring. Dormant *plumeria* do not require watering, but it may be necessary to occasionally mist the trunk due to the lower humidity of household air over the winter. *Plumerias* placed in the kitchen or bathroom may not need misting as the higher humidity of these rooms will help prevent desiccation of the trunk. *Plumerias* should be kept at a temperature of not less than 10 Celsius during the dormancy period.

## Nutrition

Bonemeal, bloodmeal, and/or organic manures should be added to the media (see 'Media', above) at potting up, but dissolved fertilizers can be applied when watering throughout the growing season. The fertilizer should have a high phosphorus content (the middle number in the fertilizer NPK formula) in order to promote flowering.