

Plumeria

“Frangipani”

These wonderful blooming plants are most often associated with Hawaii; however they grow well in most parts of the tropics. They even do great in San Diego, as long as you are in a fairly frost-free zone. They form a large shrub or small tree; prefer full sun and very good draining soil. If drainage is a problem, they can easily be used as a potted plant or in raised beds. The stems and branches are fairly stiff and thick and usually need to be a few years old to bloom. Flowers come in red, pink, yellow, white and combinations of colors such as pink, yellow, and white on the same petals rainbow. They bloom at the tip of each new growth. Many people consider them easy to grow. Give them room as they can reach 6' to 10' in time, and will grow as wide as tall. If the plant gets too big, trimming is very easy and you can root the trimmings!

The plant is deciduous (loses all of its leaves) but comes out in spring with large leaves and a fairly fast growth. They can grow as much as 12” to 18” a year under good conditions. The rich green leaves are about 8” to 15” long and deep green. Blooms usually start in May or June and continue until it gets cool in the fall. Most have a strong, pleasing, almost intoxicating fragrance.

Plumerias are easy to grow and easy to propagate. If you want to try cuttings, the best time is June, July and August. Make cuttings about 12” to 18” long and let the fresh cut part ‘callous’ over or dry for about five days. Dip the end in a rooting hormone and place in Cactus Mix or Sponge Rock. They will usually root in about six weeks. You may have to support them with a stake because the branch is heavy and may tip over if the mix is very light. Water the cuttings about two times a week, more if it is very hot. Do not keep them too wet as they will rot.

The plants are not fussy as long as they have good drainage and at least a half-day of full sun. Perhaps a little shade inland during the hottest part of the day, but not too much. Feed regularly for best results. High nitrogen fertilizers will give the most growth; however, using a fertilizer high in phosphorus will give the most bloom. Nitrogen is the first number and phosphorus is the middle number. If you use a liquid fertilizer, be sure to use it every two weeks. If you use a dry fertilizer, be sure to read the directions as feedings may vary from monthly to every four months, depending upon the brand. We usually use a dry type because you do not have to feed as often.

Mites, aphids and white fly are the few pests that may be a problem. Most can be hosed off with water. In extreme cases, consult with a nursery person to get the proper insecticide.