

## Soil Mix and Containers for Growing Healthy Plumeria

Plumeria have become quite popular as container plants, especially for those of us living in climates where it is necessary to move plants to protect from freezing winter weather. To be successful at maintaining plant health and vigor, we must choose the correct type and size container and fill with an equally well selected soil mix.

### Container Type

There are many types of pots or containers available today ranging from ceramic to plastic. While the ceramic and clay pots are generally more decorative than black plastic nursery cans, they may not be the most ideal. I use the rigid variety of black plastic nursery containers for all of my plumeria. These containers have at least 4 good drainage holes towards the bottom to allow for great drainage. They come in many sizes; 1 gallon, 2 gal., 3 gal., 5 gal. etc... Also, they are cheap!! Salt buildup is not a problem as with standard clay pots. The black plastic nursery containers are much less likely to develop a drainage problem than pots with only one drainage hole in the bottom center. Roots can grow freely through the many drainage holes without much risk of stopping drainage. In clay pots with only one drain, a tap root can fill the hole and stop drainage. If this problem were to go undetected during a wet season or after heavy watering, the Plumeria roots could be severely damaged or killed. It is therefore necessary to choose your containers carefully for the plant it will contain.

### Container Size

Choosing the correct container for your Plumeria may be one of the most important factors in determining how well it will perform for you. Experience has shown that Plumeria need ample root room while actively growing. Those grown in open ground always perform and bloom better than those held captive in small pots. A general rule of thumb is to allow 1 gallon pot size for each foot of plumeria branch / trunk length. By choosing a large enough pot, you allow more room for root growth which in turn leads to better moisture and nutrient uptake by the plant.

### Plumeria Potting Soil Mix

Plumeria are heavy feeders and appear to do well in fertile well draining soil. A good soil mix is one that allows water to soak the rootball quickly. While retaining plenty of moisture, it must allow excess water to drain within a few minutes. The good soil mix should contain plenty of nutrients to encourage growth and blossoms on plumeria also. One soil mix that works well is as follows:

- 1 part 1/4 inch bark mulch (Professional planting mix)
- 1 part good potting soil
- 1 part calcined clay, or pumice (or Soil Pro® 400, or perlite)
- 1 part sheep manure (or cow manure)
- 1 part sharp sand
- 1/6 part bone meal or superphosphate (or slow release high P plant food)

The calcined clay I referred to looks more like Kitty Litter and may be the same stuff. It is essentially a granular product derived from sintering clay at a temperature high enough to melt the individual particles together. The product is then ground and screened into various size ranges. This material can be found as a product called Soil Pro® 400 at nurseries in Houston. I have found it (slightly less fused) as oil dry at our local Hi-Lo Auto Parts Store. If this is not available, then either pumice (1/8 to 1/4 inch particles) or coarse perlite can be used. I think pumice is readily available in garden centers in the California area. Actually, Pumice might be my first choice if it were available in Houston. The purpose of this additive is to keep the soil more porous so that water drains good. Also, the porous nature of the particles will help retain water and nutrients for the plant roots to absorb and allow oxygen to percolate through the root zone. If sheep manure is not available, I suggest composted cow (or steer) manure as the second choice. I do not have experience with chicken manure, but if it is well composted, it should work as well. The idea is to get a slow release natural organic fertilizer into the soil mix.

Other additives can be used to round out this mix such as 1 part perlite and 1 part peat moss. A handful or two of Osmocote® with equal N-P-K numbers (or any another slow-release fertilizer) can be added to

ensure slow feeding over an extended period of time. This soil mixture should also be heavy enough to help keep potted plants upright in a moderate breeze.

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Published over the years in the *Plumeria Potpourri* newsletter, the Plumeria Care Bulletins were primarily authored by **Milt Pierson** and the **PSA Research Committee**.