Summer Flowering and Care for Plumeria

Summer is the time for maximum plumeria flowering in the northern hemisphere. Plumeria will bloom profusely if a few of the plant's basic needs are met. The three most important being sunlight, water and fertilizer. These requirements are few and can be easily achieved by the average plumeria enthusiast.

Plumeria plants need at least 6 to 8 hours of direct or nearly direct sunlight to bloom strongly. If a plant does not receive enough light, it will tend to grow toward the light, adding soft vegetative growth which will likely be thinner in diameter and weaker than desired. Plumeria do not bloom well if at all in the shade.

Water is very important to actively growing plumeria. Without enough water, plumeria tend to go into a state of suspended animation or dormancy. They may even abort flower stalks in an effort to reduce water loss. However, on the opposite end, plumeria do not want too much water, especially standing water on their roots. Wet feet for more than a very few days may cause root rot, which may lead to eventual total plant loss. Unfortunately, the obvious symptom of too much or not enough water, droopy leaves, is the same for either condition. Before watering a plumeria it is wise to check the top few inches of soil for moisture. If dry, then go ahead and water. The proper soil is critical for optimum plumeria growth and flowering. A good soil is one that allows water to fully penetrate, retains plenty of moisture for a number of days, while at the same time drains excess water quickly. There are many good prepackaged soils available meeting these specifications.

The third important factor in getting plumeria to bloom and grow healthily is fertilizer used in conjunction with the afore mentioned good soil and proper watering schedule. When feeding plumeria for flowers, it is best to use a product with a high phosphorous (the middle number, P) content. This element helps to make flowers larger and more abundant. The nitrogen content (the first number, N) should be relatively low. Too much nitrogen will enhance vegetative growth at the expense of flowers. Potassium (the last number, K) helps to produce a strong plant. This element needs to be present for a healthy plant, but maybe not as much as P. Commercial products that meet the fertility needs of NPK for plumeria are 'Super Bloom' and 'BR-61'. These foods should be fed to plumeria plants according to label directions every other week or at least once a month during the active growing season of April through August.

There are a host of other elements essential for plant growth and health. These include iron, magnesium, manganese, copper, boron, molybdenum, calcium, and sulfur to mention a few. The element magnesium is central to the chlorophyll molecule in plants, which makes them green and does the work of producing plant sugars from carbon dioxide and water. It is therefore quite necessary and can be fed to plumeria by adding 1 teaspoon of Epsom salt ($MgSO_4 \cdot 7H_2O$) per gallon of water at either feeding time or watering time.

The task of watering can be greatly reduced if plumeria are either planted directly in the ground or in pots sunk into flower beds. In fact, plumeria in pots in the ground probably get much of their food and water from surrounding soil after their roots have grown beyond the confines of the original container. The problem of water loss during long hot summer days can be further reduced by adding a layer of mulch to plants in the ground and doing the same for plants in pots. Not only will the mulch help reduce water loss, but it will keep soil from splashing up on the trunk, minimizing the possibility of soil born disease on your plants, and it helps to protect tender feeder roots near the soil surface from the heat of the sun.

Taking the small amount of time and effort to provide your plumeria with the basic needs will reward you with many months of beautiful flowers. Summer is truly the season for plumeria lovers.

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