

Storing Plumeria for the Winter

Many of us who love to grow Plumeria live in areas where the temperature falls to freezing and below during the winter months. Before this happens, we must protect our Plumeria by placing the plants in a storage area for the winter if we are to have blooms next year. The tender new growths where next year's flower stalks appear are the first part of a plant destroyed by frost. To prevent damage to our plants we must move them to an area that will remain above freezing for the duration of winter. Try to keep it above 40°F but the absolute minimum is 32°F for most Plumeria. This can be as simple as moving your Plumeria into your living room if you only have a few plants. On the other hand, it can mean a huge job for those of us who have many (maybe too many) Plumeria plants. Plumeria can be stored inside your house, garage, attic, closet, or greenhouse. They require no light while dormant, however if you have a sunroom to store Plumeria, they may break dormancy and flower sooner. The most important factor is the temperature.

If you have only a few Plumeria growing in pots, you can merely bring them inside your house or garage. The leaves will naturally yellow then fall in response to the lower light intensity and shorter day length. If you do not want to be continuously picking up leaves, remove them by snipping the leaf petioles about an inch from the trunk. The remaining stubs will yellow and fall off naturally within a week or two. Plumeria do not need water during the winter rest period. In fact, too much water while the plant is dormant can potentially cause the roots to rot off, leading to the loss of your Plumeria from the bottom up. The stems may shrivel slightly but this is not a problem. These stems will swell and grow when normal watering resumes in the spring when the danger of frost is past and the Plumeria is back outside. You may add a cup or so of water per month to each plant, especially younger or smaller ones, to prevent desiccation of stems. Remember that less is better than more when it comes to water on Plumeria in the dormant season.

For many of us, bringing the plants in for winter is a much more complicated task. Not only are there Plumeria growing in pots on the patio, there are pots of Plumeria sunk into flower beds and Plumeria planted directly in the ground. The first step is usually to remove all leaves by clipping the petioles or simply stripping by firmly stroking the branch tips from top downward. The stripping method is much quicker but may occasionally leave larger scars where tissue is damaged. Bringing in the pots from the patio is basically the same as for above. They can be brought into the storage area and placed as close as possible to each other to maximize space utility. However, the pots sunk into flower beds need to be carefully lifted by slipping a shovel or spade fork under the pot and prying up while balancing the plant. Once lifted from the ground, prune the roots dangling from weep holes and remove excess soil from the outside pot surface. Bring these pots and plants into the storage area and place in an efficient manner.

Bringing in Plumeria planted directly in the ground follows a procedure similar to that for pots sunk into flower beds. First, remove the leaves by stripping or clipping if you can reach them. You may have to remove leaves later or let them fall naturally by themselves. Next, cut into the soil on all sides of the trunk at the desired root ball radius with a shovel or sharpshooter. Then, force the shovel under the root ball and pry up while balancing the plant. Lift the root ball from the soil and gently remove excess soil before pruning the roots to a manageable size. You may want to individually bag each root ball before placing in the storage area to keep soil from falling off. This is not necessary however. You may choose to place as many bare root Plumeria root balls as will fit into a large plastic lined box in the garage, then strap the group together for tidiness.

However you choose to store your Plumeria for winter, there are a few points to remember. Most important is remember to allow yourself enough time to beat the freeze. Also, do not place Plumeria roots or pots directly on the concrete floor of your garage or greenhouse. The cold from the concrete may damage your Plumeria roots and lead them to rot especially if moisture is in contact with the cold roots. This is more likely a problem than the leaching of lime as previously thought. Good air circulation is a must to minimize pests and disease on Plumeria in storage. Watch for spider mites on the growing points especially as spring approaches. Treat as necessary.