

Plumeria Potpourri

The Plumeria Society of America



March 13th Meeting!

Tuesday, March 13, 2018, 7:30 p.m.
Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion, 1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, Texas

... anyone with an interest in plumeria is invited to attend ...

Speaker: Loretta Osteen

Topic: A Passion for Plumeria

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President's Corner

by Ray Allison (RayAllison@GaryGreene.com)

Howdy all, I am Ray Allison, the new 2018–19 President of The Plumeria Society of America. While a relatively new member of the PSA, plumeria are not new to me, having grown up in the Bahamas. At a young age I found the tropical flora and fauna in the Bahamas amazing and so different from Texas. I soon learned about plumeria, as they can grow wild in the Bahamas. I inherited my love of growing all plants from my maternal grandmother who had a wonderful garden in rural Arkansas.

Also, I greatly enjoy charity work, as a few years ago, I was Board Chairman of the downtown Houston YMCA, conducting their Board Meetings and speaking in a variety of places for the causes of the Houston YMCA. Also, I am active in my church as a frequent Lector in Mass and other activities. My speaking voice has been developed over many years; it began with conducting real estate sales meetings and having to get and keep everyone's attention. As a practicing Commercial Real Estate Broker, I frequently speak at various sales meetings.

With a full slate of Directors and Officers for the PSA, everyone has been very helpful getting me up to speed on the history and inner workings of the

group. Over the next year the Board and I will attend to several items that we hear the membership requesting and continue to have a full slate of interesting speakers, garden visits, and activities in addition to our two annual sales.

"A Passion for Plumeria" will be our topic from Loretta Osteen at our March 13th. Her program will include a history of plumeria, including a description of flower shapes and fragrance. Her program will also cover bringing plumeria out of winter storage, propagation, and information on growing plumeria in our Texas Gulf Coast region. Loretta has been a PSA member for 15 years and is a Galveston County Master Gardener.

We are planning to have a PSA presence at the Home Show at the George R. Brown Convention Center on the weekend of April 6th and will need volunteers to assist in that effort. More information and a sign up sheet for volunteers will be at the March 13th meeting.

New members and ideas are always welcome. My cell is 832-689-9938 and email is RayAllison@GaryGreene.com. I look forward to hearing from you!

In Memorium—Paul Weissich

Paul Weissich recently passed away at the age of 92. Koko Crater on Oahu, Hawaii is one of the five gardens he developed when director of Foster Garden in Honolulu from 1957 to 1989. Many plumeria lovers have visited Koko Crater—it is home to a collection of large plumeria trees.

During his many years at Foster Garden, Paul Weissich expanded it from 5 acres to 14 acres of native plants, and developed four additional sites (Koko Crater, Lili'uokalani, Ho'omaluhia, and Wahiawa) to create the 650 acres of the Honolulu Botanical Gardens system. Taken as a whole, these five gardens feature rare species from tropical environments ranging from desert to rainforest,



comprising the largest and most diverse tropical plant collection in the United States. A lovely yellow/orange plumeria carries Paul Weissich's name.

Storm in the Plumeria Patch

by Hetty Ford, Florida

For nine years it was my privilege and special joy to be in charge of the Plumeria Collection at Naples Botanical Garden. Many people expressed their envy when they found out what I was doing for a living ... the building of the collection and caring for it was an exciting time for me.

For those of you who don't know how Naples became the repository of this collection, here is a brief history. The basis of the collection was formed by cuttings from Elizabeth Thornton's plants which were generously donated in 2008 by her daughter Bette Gips. A local collector's group of plants became the second addition that same year, and a friend who also lived near Naples and had to give up her home contributed over 100 plants in 2009 and 2010. Meanwhile the PSA had decided that Naples would be the perfect location to gather all the registered cultivars, and encouraged members to send (or bring) their cuttings or plants to me, which many of them did. With an expansion at the Garden occurring at that same time, giving us a fantastic location, we were on the way! In 2016 many plumeria aficionados came to Naples for the International Plumeria Conference to see the collection with their own eyes, and we all anticipated that "the Hills" would continue to



Devastation



Not a pretty sight

flourish and grow and become a veritable plumeria forest!

But Mother Nature had other plans. After 12 years without a significant storm ("Wilma" in 2005 had been the last one to affect the Naples area), we might have become just a tad complacent, but frankly there is no way we could have protected the many trees on such an exposed location when "Irma" decided to visit on September 10, 2017.

To make matters worse, I was not even in Naples when the storm was approaching but happily away on a vacation in Canada! When it became clear that the storm was heading to our

side of the state, we had to break this off to return home barely in time to board up our house, grab our cats, and get the heck out of the way of the threatening disaster. I had to trust my colleagues at the Garden to have made any possible precautions—fortunately they had taken cuttings of the rarest of our plants, mostly the many Caribbean species.

It was a week after "Irma" blew through that I was first able to go to the Garden. I know now what the saying "my heart sank" means. When first looking at the Hills, I was convinced there was no way this was ever going to be put right again. To say that I was

massively discouraged, even depressed, would be an understatement. All in all, approximately 300 of the 500 trees on the Hills were down or badly damaged. But as the saying goes, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step,” so we got on with the task of triage—which trees were a total loss, which could be salvaged, and which required only minor staking or pruning.

The three huge *Miami Rose* trees were beyond our ability to put back up. One received a major trim and was put back up with the help of a machine, and the other two were condemned. Hours of backbreaking work in 90 degree heat and oppressive humidity, uprighting, and securing as many as 50 trees a day, day after day, fortunately with the help of some amazing volunteers, saw the Hills slowly rise again, and as we all know, plumeria are pretty forgiving, and some continued to bloom while still lying down, and many of them were starting new shoots from the broken branches within weeks of the storm’s passing.

Yes, this has set the future plumeria forest back a bit ... it will be a few more years before the trees will lushly cover the area. But I hope you will continue to support the Collection (which is officially accredited with the Plant Collections Network of the American Public Gardens

Association), keep sending cuttings of your newly registered cultivars, and by all means, come visit!!

BONUS: The trees on the Hills set seeds a lot since the use of pesticides is strictly limited, so pollinators abound. PSA members can get 25 free mixed seeds from the plumeria hills by sending a stamped, self-addressed small bubble envelope to Sandra Rigotti-Santos, Naples Botanical Garden, 4820 Bayshore Drive, Naples FL 34112



Luc’s Magnum Opus was one of the first to be uprighted. We were using downed bamboo as stakes as there was a great shortage of supplies.



Right after the storm ...



Three months after the storm ...



Volunteers rock

The Plumeria

Part 1: Introduction and History

by **Donald R. Hodel** (drhodel@ucanr.edu)
University of California, Cooperative Extension
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On January 3, 1970, I was a senior in high school and my family was returning from a holiday trip to Hawaii, my first time in these extraordinary islands, and I purchased a plumeria or frangipani lei in the Honolulu Airport to carry back with me to California. The next morning in California I opened the plastic bag containing the lei, and the distinctive, heavy, sweet fragrance wafted out and up into my face, immediately transporting me back to Hawaii and the memories of a special place and trip.

Less than five years later I returned to Hawaii in August, 1974 to begin graduate studies in tropical horticulture at the University of Hawaii. I clearly remember exiting the air conditioned Honolulu Airport baggage claim area out to the street to hire a taxi and was blasted by the heat and humidity, but even more so by the pleasant, heady fragrance of plumeria, from leis bestowed upon newly arrived tourists but also from the numerous plants adorning the airport grounds.

About two years later in September, 1976 I had just arrived in Tahiti in French Polynesia at the end of a three-month plant collecting trip to the South Pacific for my employer, the National Tropical Botanical Garden on Kauai. I strolled innocently into the Jardin Botanique Harrison Smith just a few hours after my arrival and was greeted by the smiling receptionist, a young, beguiling Tahitian woman with a thick, flowing mane of long, dark hair and a single, bright yellow plumeria flower tucked strategically behind her right ear. We kissed on both cheeks, the traditional French greeting, and, as I did so on her right side, I received a powerful jolt of the sweet, heavy, heady plumeria fragrance, and that did it. It was love at first sight and we were married about a year later.

Plumeria is a very special flower and plant for me, and, perhaps more than anything, it is its distinctive, wonderful fragrance, which conjures up

so many special and poignant memories that I treasure most. Here I begin to honor the flower and plant with the first installment of a multi-part series on the Plumeria, which includes about seven or so species of small trees with white, milky sap and handsome, fragrant flowers restricted to mostly dry areas in the American tropics, from Mexico to northern South America and extending on to the Caribbean Islands (Leeuwenberg 2005). Topics covered in this series will include its history, botany, species, hybrids and cultivars, uses, and horticulture.



Plumeria pudica, Nuku Hiva, Marquesas Islands
French Polynesia

History

The indigenous peoples of the Americas who lived within the natural range of Plumeria were the

first to encounter this plant, which figured prominently in their lives and culture (Zumbroich 2013). An intense interest in sensory pleasures developed in early but sophisticated Mesoamerican and Mexican cultures, and was typically centered in flowers, especially the handsome and fragrant plumeria (Zumbroich 2013). Mayans, who gave the name *nikte'* (nic, flower, and -te, tree) to plumerias (Zumbroich 2013), believed that K'akoch, Father of the Gods, created plumerias, which were considered symbols of truth, immortality, fertility, and female sexuality (Ross et al. 2008, Zumbroich 2013). Plumerias were mostly reserved for royalty, and a commoner who picked or even smelled a flower could be punished by death (Ross et al. 2008).

Aztec royalty also highly revered plumerias, which they called *cacaloxochitl*, planting them around homes of the nobility, exchanging flowers at feasts, inscribing stylized images of the flowers on ceramics and codices, and giving names to the numerous varieties (Zumbroich 2013). Many parts of the plumeria plant, especially the white, milky sap, were used extensively for a wide range of herbal remedies for various medical ailments (Ross et al. 2008, Zumbroich 2013).

One of the first written accounts of plumerias was in the Badianus Manuscript of 1552, also known as the *Libellus de Medicinalibus Indorum Herbis* (Latin for "Little Book of the Medicinal Herbs of the Indians"), which was an Aztec herbal manuscript describing and illustrating plants and their medicinal uses and the first of its kind produced in the Americas (Ross et al. 2008, Byland 2000, Zumbroich 2013). Commissioned by Francisco de Mendoza, son of the first viceroy of New Spain, the author was the indigenous Martin de la Cruz, who wrote it in Nahuatl in 1552, and the indigenous Codex de la Cruz-Badiano, for whom the manuscript is named, translated it into Latin. Both performed their work under the supervision of Jacobo de Grado, a Catholic friar in charge of the Convent of Tlateloco and the College of Santa Cruz

(Byland 2000, Zumbroich 2013).

The Spanish themselves became enamored with plumeria and are primarily responsible for taking it out of the Americas and around the tropics in the late 16th century, likely first to their possession the Philippines, where by the late 1600s it was widespread and commonly cultivated in nearly every town (Zumbroich 2013). From the Philippines plumerias spread west and south to China, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, and India. By 1653 Dutch naturalist George Eberhard Rumpf found plumeria in Ambon in the Moluccas of present day Indonesia (Ross et al. 2008, Zumbroich 2013). By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, plumerias were in most tropical countries (Rock 1917). Strangely, plumerias did not arrive in Polynesia, a region perhaps now more closely associated with the plant and flower than any other in the world, until the mid to late 19th century.

Because of their beauty, fragrance, and relative ease of propagation and cultivation, and perhaps as a carryover from their spiritual importance in the Americas, the Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu religions easily adopted plumerias, and they were commonly planted around temples, churches, and other religious sites, including graveyards. Indeed, plumerias are sometimes commonly referred to as the pagoda tree or temple tree (Ross et al. 2008).

During the 18th century, European explorers and collectors in Asia, Africa, and the Americas began sending seeds and plants they encountered in their travels back to botanical gardens and horticultural firms on the Continent. Many universities, cities, and nations had or sponsored botanical gardens where tropical treasures, including Plumeria, were cultivated in heated conservatories and "stove houses." Similarly, many prominent European nursery firms began to propagate and grow Plumeria and many other tropical plants in their stove houses to meet the growing demand of an increasingly sophisticated European gardening society. This pattern of plant exploration and

introduction continued into the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the latter half of the 19th century is often considered the golden age of European horticulture.

Although native to the New World, plumerias were frequently grown outdoors in most tropical and subtropical areas around the world during the 20th century, where, in addition to ornamental uses, they were still frequently associated with temples and graveyards. In the United States, plumerias became more common in Florida, Texas, and California, where they were grown in the ground or, in cold-winter areas, in containers that could be moved indoors for protection from freezing temperatures.

However, it was in post-WWII Hawaii and the explosive growth of the tourist industry there that the popularity of plumerias increased dramatically (Leeuwenberg 2005). The German doctor and then botanist William Hillebrand, who traveled to and stayed for many years in Hawaii for health reasons, is credited with introducing plumerias to the Islands in 1860 (Little 2006, Ross et al. 2008). For about the next 80 years, up until WWII, plumerias had mostly been planted in cemeteries, and then primarily the hardy, common yellow-flowered cultivar of *Plumeria rubra* that became known as *Common Yellow*, *Graveyard Yellow*, and now *Celadine* (Criley 2005, Eggenberger and Eggenberger 1988, Leeuwenberg 2005, Little 2006). Thus, plumerias were commonly associated with death (McDonald 1989).

As the tourist industry in Hawaii soared after WWII, however, the notion of a lei greeting for every tourist gained traction, and plumeria flowers were the logical, natural choice (Leeuwenberg 2005). The plants were abundant and easy to grow and the colorful, pleasingly fragrant flowers had good keeping quality (Criley 2005). Lei composed of plumeria flowers quickly became the most plentiful in Hawaii. Tourists, both coming and going, received or purchased plumeria lei (McDonald 1989).

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, much of

the important, modern, researched-based information about plumeria horticulture was developed at the University of Hawaii. Taking a prominent role in this research was Dr. Richard Criley, who is now considered one of the foremost authorities of plumeria cultivation.



Plumeria rubra, Lakewood, California

In the latter half of the 20th and early 21st centuries, avid if not fanatical collectors and growers, first in Hawaii, including such famous plumeria personages as William Moragne and Jim Little, and then in other tropical countries like Thailand and the Philippines, championed plumerias and developed, propagated and distributed species, hybrids, and cultivar selections. (Little 2006, Ross et al. 2008) The number of named hybrids and especially cultivar selections of *Plumeria rubra* soared into the 1000s. Because of the increasing popularity of the plant and flowers, collectors, growers, and fanciers of plumerias banded together for educational and social reasons and numerous associations were born, such as The Plumeria Society of America, which was organized in 1979 in Houston, Texas (Thornton and Thornton 1985) and is the official registry site for plumeria hybrid and cultivar names.

Because of their association with Hawaii and their exotic, colorful, and fragrant flowers, even lay people in marginal plumeria growing areas such as California, who often received plants as novelty gifts

or purchased rooted cuttings in the airport when departing Hawaii, begin to grow their plants outdoors, in the ground, or as potted subjects. Now even the big-box home improvement stores in California and elsewhere seasonally offer plumerias in their garden sections.

The digital age and social media have supported and encouraged increased contact among plumeria growers and collectors locally, nationally, and internationally, making it easier to exchange information and, in many instances, plants. Now one can easily go online and mail-order a particular plumeria.

Who knows what the future will hold for plumerias. However, because of their relative ease of growth, cultural adaptability, and exquisite, exotic, colorful, deliciously fragrant flowers, they will continue to be highly esteemed and gain in popularity.

NEXT: Part 2: Botany

Acknowledgements

Dr. Richard Criley, who has had a long and distinguished career in the tropical horticulture department at the University of Hawaii, reviewed the manuscript and offered valuable suggestions to improve it.

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Plumeria obtusa, Honolulu, Hawaii

The Theory of My Plumeria Evolution

by Joe Malinak, Alabama

Darwinism is a theory of biological evolution developed by the English naturalist Charles Darwin (1809–1882) and others, stating that all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce. If Darwin happened to be my next door neighbor in Alabama, I think he would say I have evolved, and I hope he would think in a positive direction. Although the older I get, my wife insists I act more like a 5-year old these days. I think that's a privilege of a senior citizen.

I have evolved with my plumeria interests over the 20 plus years of collecting and growing, and I am sure my story is much like many of you reading this article. While I still have a need to collect named varieties like *Metallica*, *Marble Ice Cream*, *Kissy Berry*, *Dragon Tears*, and *Golden Noi*, just to name a few from world-class growers, I find that my interests are evolving in a direction of growing more plumeria seeds.

I started growing plumeria seeds more as an experiment nearly 10 years ago while living in Melbourne, Florida. I found that I did not have the patience nor ideal growing practices netting any positive results. I would start 20 seeds, and carefully get them started to a nice old age of 6 months and then winter would arrive. Each year in Melbourne I would allow my plumeria to go dormant over the winter and that included my seedlings. I found that I would lose several seedlings over winter simply because they were too young and the roots were not established well enough to allow the seedlings to survive winter storage. In spring I would bring out the remaining seedling survivors and watch them grow leaves and get taller and then in winter place them in storage again. After repeating this process year after year with no blooms to speak of, I lost interest and focused on named plumeria that would bloom and bloom. Grafted named plumeria was

“where it was at” for me then.

Moving from Florida to Alabama and building a greenhouse for my plumeria inspired me to tackle seedlings one more time. Three years ago I jumped in with both feet and started with 100 seeds. Two critical revelations occurred during these three learning years: 1) I had a crash course learning how to grow inside a greenhouse requiring time, research, and \$\$\$\$; and 2) growing little seeds is fun, but eventually these little guys in pint-sized pots need to be up-potted to 3 and 5 gallon pots, and I needed to find pots and make room for them inside and outside of the greenhouse. So those of you who are growing seeds, remember, if you are successful, you will need additional resources like pots and space. My downfall with my first attempt growing seedlings in Florida was allowing them to go dormant over winter. Although most of us do not have a choice, this process only extended the drought of blooming seedlings. It seemed like I was waiting up to 5 years for a bloom, and when it was a disappointing flower, I had to scratch my head and wonder if it was worth the effort. Now having the greenhouse allows me to grow seedlings year round, really shortening the growing period and producing blooms much faster. I now have seedlings blooming as early as 18 months, but the norm seems like 24 months.

The anticipation grows and grows as you see that first inflo develop on your seedling, and sometimes you are rewarded with a spectacular bloom! After putting in all that time raising a seedling from a tiny plant to a blooming plumeria, sometimes even the mediocre blooms look pretty nice. Having that first seedling bloom for me has been exciting, but then you realize that it's still not over. Seedlings may vary from bloom cycle to bloom cycle for the first few years. The experts say three bloom cycles provide adequate time to know exactly what the seedling bloom will finally look like. Knowing this, it

makes me really pause and appreciate the time and effort plumeria growers endure to introduce new varieties. How many seedlings have been grown before uncovering **amazing** varieties like *Metallica*, *Dragon Tears*, *Pride of Nui*, and in my opinion the most striking of all plumeria, *Tropical Aurora*. I imagine hundreds and even thousands of seedlings were grown before finding that pinnacle plumeria.

My lessons learned?

1. **Don't allow your seedlings to go dormant.** Some folks don't have a choice, but if you can, keep them growing through winter.
2. **Heat is essential**—use heat mats to keep the roots stimulated and growing through winter.
3. **Light makes it all happen.** T5 high-intensity lights work well for seedlings. Keeping the lights 6–8 inches from the seedlings works best.
4. **Fertilize and water often.** Having seedlings on a heat mat and using lights will dry your soil quickly. I find using a liquid fertilizer (even Miracle-Gro) will boost growing.
5. This applies to mature plants as well as seedlings—**use a fast draining soil mix.** I can't emphasize this enough.
6. My practice has been, **starting seeds in January** using heating mats and T5 lights. I start my seeds using the paper towel method, and once the stem root is showing, I transplant into a small pint pot. I keep the seedling in that pint pot for maybe 3 months before transplanting into a one-gallon pot. Each seedling is different in its

growing habits, some grow faster than others. It is possible by late summer some seedlings may outgrow the one-gallon pot and need to be up-potted to 3 gallons before fall. My reasoning for starting seeds in January is to allow the roots to grow and become well established. It's easier to care for a seedling in winter that has girth and is 8–12 inches tall, than a pencil thin seedling with a weak root system.

7. Once you have successfully grown your seedlings from pint-sized pots and moved them into one gallons, **pull together a plan** understanding how you're going to manage continued growth with 3 and 5 or even 15-gallon pots.
8. Growing seedlings is a **test of patience.** If you're lucky you may see a bloom in just 2 years, but more likely that window will be greater. Then, once you have that first bloom, you'll have to wait for a second and third cycle to be confident of the characteristics of your new bloom.
9. **Be Organized.** Once that first bloom occurs make sure you tag the plant accordingly and take pictures. Knowing how the blooms differ, or if they differ for the first few bloom cycles, is a great tool for looking back upon for reference

My journey growing seedlings has just begun with 3 years under my belt. I've had some real promising first-time blooms but still have several more years to go before leaving a tiny bit of legacy into our wonderful plumeria hobby.

Some of my recent seedlings ...



Photos by Joe Malinak Photography



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2018 Houston Area Plant Sale Calendar

Clear Lake Sale (1st sale)

- May 1 Commitment to sell at Clear Lake
- May 8 Sellers' meeting after the general meeting
- May 30 Cultivar list for Clear Lake sale
- June 9 Sale at Clear Lake

Clear Lake Sale (2nd sale)

- July 3 Commitment to sell at Clear Lake
- July 10 Sellers' meeting after the general meeting
- July 11 Cultivar list for Clear Lake sale
- July 21 Sale at Clear Lake

Contact
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Our new website is easier to navigate and to find information about plumeria care, cultivar registration, society news, events, and much more! Since the website is new, please check for updates and to see added features such as the flower identification database and a members only newsletter archive! Below is the current MEMBERS ONLY login and password information that will be needed to access the website's newsletter archive.

Log in: **psamember** Password: **Scottpratt93**
Twitter feed: **@Plumeriasociety**



Joining the PSA ...

www.theplumeriasociety.org

Click on "Join the PSA" tab at the top of the home page.

To join by mail, select PDF.

To join online, select Online Form (Paypal).

When joining by mail, send a check to:

The Plumeria Society of America, Inc.

P.O. Box 22791

Houston, TX 77227-2791, USA

Dues are \$35 per year

Purpose of The Plumeria Society of America

1. Promote interest in and increase knowledge of plumeria hybridization, propagation, and culture of plumerias.
2. Share this knowledge with hobbyists interested in plumerias.
3. Provide a register for recording, identifying, and classifying by name new types and varieties of plumerias.
4. Encourage and unite plumeria enthusiasts around the globe, throughout America, and across the seas.

When does your PSA membership expire?

Your newsletter envelope mailing label has your membership expiration date

2018 PSA Calendar

January 9 (Historic Clubhouse, 6201 Hermann Drive, Houston, Texas)meeting
 March 13meeting
 May 8meeting
 June 9 (Bay Area Community Center Seabrook/Clear Lake) Show & Sale I
 July 10meeting
 July 21 (Bay Area Community Center Seabrook/Clear Lake) Show & Sale 2
 October 9 Fall Social (potluck) & meeting

- Meetings are held at Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion, 1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, Texas.
- Meetings begin at 7:30 p.m. You're welcome to come 30–45 minutes before the meeting for snacks and chat.
- We have a raffle, guest speakers, and more.
- Non-members are always welcome!
- Bring your blooms. Bring your friends.
- Bring plants, cuttings, etc. for door prizes! These can be anything, not just plumerias.

2018 PSA Officers and Directors

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