

## Gardening



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### Frangipani

Native to tropical regions of South America and the islands of the Caribbean, the salverform flowers of frangipani have a waxy perfection and often heady fragrance that makes it one of the most widely cultivated plants in tropical and subtropical regions. Belonging to the genus *Plumeria*, trees are named after French botanist, Charles Plumier.



### Cultural requirements

While good drainage is essential, frangipani thrive despite poor soil, varying pH and extended period of dryness. Coastal sea breezes and exposure to salt laden winds present no problem to the thick leathery, alternate leaves that cluster at the ends of the stems. Truly waterwise plants, they prefer full sun and are well-suited to pot culture. Frangipani belong to the family Apocynaceae and are related to *Allamanda*, *Nerium* (oleander), *Trachelospermum* (star jasmine) and *Mandevilla*. They bleed a milky white sap that can be irritating when harvesting blooms or pruning, but helps protect plants from the majority of pests.

### Classification

Botanists differ in their classification and assessment of the precise number of frangipani species, but three main types are readily available.

*Plumeria rubra* -The majority of the colourful forms of frangipani originate from this deciduous species. Terminal flowers often appear before the leaves have fully emerged. Blooms continue to open on fully foliated plants, providing an enviable display from late spring through to the end of autumn. This is followed by a short period of dormancy, largely determined by the length of the dry season. Bali Whorl is a popular selection with ten petals as opposed to the usual five.



*Plumeria pudica* – The fiddle- or spoon-leaf frangipani has a compact, upright habit that is perfect for narrow gardens and pots. While promoted as evergreen and continuous blooming, it stops flowering and can drop its foliage during a cool, dry subtropical winter. Blooms have little fragrance and commonly white with a yellow centre, but a pale pink form is also known.

*Plumeria obtusa* – This largely evergreen frangipani is often referred to as the Singapore frangipani. The delicately perfumed blooms are predominantly white, but a short, spreading pink form is sold under the name Petite Pink. Plants flower almost continuously in tropical regions and through summer and autumn in subtropical climates.



There are other species collectors can look for including the narrow-petalled *Plumeria stenophylla*.

### Propagation

Occasionally you may discover cigar-shaped seed pods on frangipani. Pods that form in summer will be ready for harvest the following spring. Viable seed germinates in 7-10 days, but germination to flowering requires 3-4 years.

Propagation by cutting is an easier option. In the case of *Plumeria rubra* you can create instant trees by planting 2m long branches cut from trees when they are deciduous. Select a well-branched stem, allow to dry in the shade for at least two weeks and plant so that 1/3 of the stems is below ground. Water sparingly.

*Plumeria pudica* and *Plumeria obtusa* are easily grown from cuttings 1m or less that are taken when the plant is in active growth.

### Diseases and Pests

All frangipani are potentially susceptible to frangipani rust (*Coleosporium domingense* syn *C. plumeriae*). Yellow pustules appear on the undersides of the leaves and cause premature defoliation. If the wet season is early, plants are shaded or air circulation is poor, rust infestations will occur early in the season – often prior to December. A late wet season and sunny, hot, dry positions (exposed to coastal sea breezes or reflected heat from a north-facing wall) reduce rust susceptibility.

Copper is an organic spray option. Propanol-based disinfectant and chemical fungicides are available, but nothing will completely prevent disease when conditions are conducive to its development.



Black tip dieback and stem rot are best controlled by pruning back to healthy growth and disposing of infected material.