



# COACHELLA VALLEY PLUMERIA

## Caring For Plumeria in the Coachella Valley

### WINTER (NOVEMBER/FEBRUARY)

#### DORMANCY

**LOCATION:** As plumeria go into dormancy, the remaining leaves will continue to fall off naturally. Remember not to cut or pull them off, which exposes the plant to infection. A few varieties such as *Plumeria obtusa* 'Dwarf Singapore Pink' and *Plumeria pudica* 'Bridal Bouquet' retain their leaves year-round in tropical or warm climates. These evergreen types are characterized by dark, glossy, rounded leaves (obtusa) or fiddle-shaped leaves (pudica) and provide a more consistent tropical appearance.

**CUTTINGS:** To store cuttings to plant in the Spring, cut off any flowers, inflo stalks or leaves on the cutting to allow the end to dry (callous) so no latex (the white sticky liquid) is flowing out. It is best to store them upright in a container of perlite or on crumpled paper. Keep in a dark and dry place (garage, storage closet) off the cold concrete floor and away from extreme temperature drops and moisture.

Unwrapped – For cuttings that are not wrapped, place the bottom half of the cutting loosely in crumpled newspaper, this will help contain any latex leaking from the cut and protect the plant.

Wrapped – For cuttings dipped in sulfur/rooting powder mix and the end wrapped in plastic with tape or rubber band, the ends will callous and protect the plant.

Bag-Rooted – Fill a sandwich baggie with moist (not wet!) 50/50 perlite/cactus mix. Place the cutting into the mix. Wrap the bag around the stem and seal with tape (electrical, sports). Leave it undisturbed, in a warm dry location, to allow roots to grow into the medium. (see more on bag rooting).

In Pots – Keep the plant in the same pot until spring. Place potted plants indoors or a warmer outside area like a covered patio or near the house under an overhanging eave. This will protect them from rainfall or gutters or drenching your plant. Elevate off the cold concrete or asphalt by placing the pots on shelves, blankets or flattened cardboard.

In Ground – Stake any young trees, securing the trunk and limbs to prevent snapping off during strong winter winds. Make sure trunks are clear of rock, debris or fallen leaves that can trap cold air or water on the surface of the trunk. This protects the trunk from cold damage or hibernating pests/fungus until Spring.

**WATER:** "Plumeria like their heads wet and their feet dry." Avoid nighttime watering in cold weather.

Cuttings – Storing cuttings is like tucking them in for a long winter nap. Since cuttings (except for those you are bag rooting) have no roots, water can only be taken into the cutting by lightly misting the stalk.

Unwrapped and Wrapped – Cuttings will not need any regular water during dormancy. Check cuttings periodically to see if they are dehydrating (getting wrinkled or soft). If they are dehydrating lightly mist the stem (stay away from any wrapping) every other day, until the stalk is firm again. Keep an eye on them periodically. Repeat as necessary.

Bag-rooted – Check the bag periodically for sufficient moisture (condensation the inside of the bag). If it is too dry, roots will not develop. If needed, inject some water into the bag with a syringe (medical/turkey, etc.). Be careful not to over-water! If you see roots forming in the bag – you're successful!

In Pots or in the Ground – Most plumeria will be sleeping during Winter dormancy and will not be producing or sustain any leaf growth with exception of evergreen Plumeria varieties. However, plumeria in pots usually have an established root system. Check on your plumeria periodically to see if they are dehydrating (soft or wrinkled). If dehydrating, lightly mist the stalk every other day, until it is firm again. Keep an eye on them periodically. Repeat as necessary. Additionally, with pots, you want to give their roots enough water to sustain life, but not growth. Test the soil with your finger or a water meter and only water when the soil is dry. That could mean watering once a week, every other week or only once a month. There is little to no evaporation of water during the winter, and you want to keep your plumeria from rotting or getting too cold.

**FERTILIZER/AMENDMENTS:** Absolutely NO FERTILIZER during dormancy.

Fertilizer – Fertilizer feeds your plumeria and in turn they grow. In dormancy, we want to them sleep.

Amendments – You can continue to amend your soil during dormancy with products like worm tea, once a month by integrating into your winter watering schedule. If using tap water for worm tea, let the water sit for 24 hours to let the chlorine dissipate, which reduces the efficacy of worm tea.

**WEATHER:** “No leaves, No water.”

Although extreme cold temperatures are not common in the desert, take care to protect your plant from cold and wind. Blacktip on plumeria can form under 32°, often caused by cold damage from frost or damp conditions which lead to rot, or from fungal and insect issues. Frost Cloth or low-watt holiday lights or a bed sheet (no plastic) can keep cold at bay.

Cutting – Your cuttings have been placed in a garage or closet off the cold concrete and away from winter weather that will drop below freezing.

In Pots and In Ground–

- For rain: If you have a plant in a place where it rains, place one side of the pot on a 2"x4", tilting so water will not pool at the bottom and will run out of the drain holes.
- For cold: If your pots are outside and the weather is predicted to drop below 35°, make sure they are not touching the cold patio or wall. Drape the plant and pot with frost cloth and/or or low-watt holiday lights all the way down to the ground, if possible. If you have a 2- or 3-inch depression in a pot, the cold air will settle inside that space and freeze the plant at the soil level. Fill the pot with mulch and mound a cone around the trunk to keep the trunk from freezing.

In Ground –

- For Rain: No additional watering
- For Cold: If the temperature is predicted to drop below 35°, drape your plumeria all the way down to the base of the plant with frost cloth or sheet (no plastic). Or even better, string low-watt holiday lights (NOT

LED) on your plumeria and drape with frost cloth or sheet around the trunk making sure to include the base of the plant to keep cold air away. Remember to remove sheets/blankets following any cold event.

### **PESTS/DISEASES:**

Red Solder Mites - Mites will remain on plants over the winter and will cause puckering of leaves in the spring. If you see damage, you already have a good population of them. Malathion is an effective control (follow instructions on the label). Mites are hard to see with the naked eye.

Giant White Fly - White Flies are sap sucking insects and deposit eggs on leaves. Wash off leaves with a strong spray of water to dislodge the flies and eggs. You can then foliar spray with neem oil; some have found worm tea to be effective. Pick up leaves and dispose of them in a plastic bag that you can leave in the sun to sterilize. Note: Ants often farm white flies, so keep a look out for ants.

Soft Brown Scale - Scale are small raised brown spots on the underside of leaves. You may also notice them on the tips and further down the trunk. The adults are protecting the young eggs which, when hatched, will spread fast. A sucking insect will cause the trunk to become crooked. Malathion is a good control (follow instructions on label).

Rust - Common on *Plumeria rubra* 'Red', *Plumeria obtusa* 'Dwarf Singapore', and *Plumeria pudica* 'Bridal Bouquet'. Caused by microscopic spores that travel and are carried by splashing rain or wind and thrive in humid conditions. Rust fungus does not kill Plumeria but can rapidly de-foliate an entire tree. To control rust, set up a care regimen:

- Keep the growing area clean and free of fallen leaves.
- Carefully remove and place infected leaves into a trash bag as the disease can spread. Reminder: clean/sterilize cutting shears with 70% alcohol. Do not compost!
- Improve air circulation by thinning leaves and giving each tree plenty of space to grow.
- Mild outbreaks can be controlled by fungicides (e.g. Captain Jack's Copper Fungicide).
- Treat affected plumeria (and surrounding soil during the dormant season) with a broad-spectrum fungicide, (e.g. BioAdvance 3 in 1).

### **LOOKING AHEAD:**

First Feeding – Between February 14 - Valentine's Day and March 17 - St. Patrick's Day

[See soil preparations]

Planting – Coachella Valley enjoys a long planting and growing season, which means trimming and planting begin in late February, earlier than our neighboring colder climates along the Southern California coast.