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Plumeria Overview - the Colors and Fragrance of the Tropics

If you grow plumeria at home – and we hope you do – you'll enjoy gorgeous, beautifully scented flowers over a long bloom season. Some plumeria flowers are so incredibly fragrant that they have been used in the perfume industry since the 16th century. However, if you're not familiar with these tropical beauties, or are just getting started, here is a little bit of history, some basics on growing your own plumeria, plus examples of some common varieties.

Most visitors associate plumeria with Hawaiian leis, a floral necklace representing the Aloha spirit. But plumeria are not indigenous to the Hawaiian Islands! Their original home is Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America. Over time, the trees spread throughout the tropics, growing in warm, frost free climates.

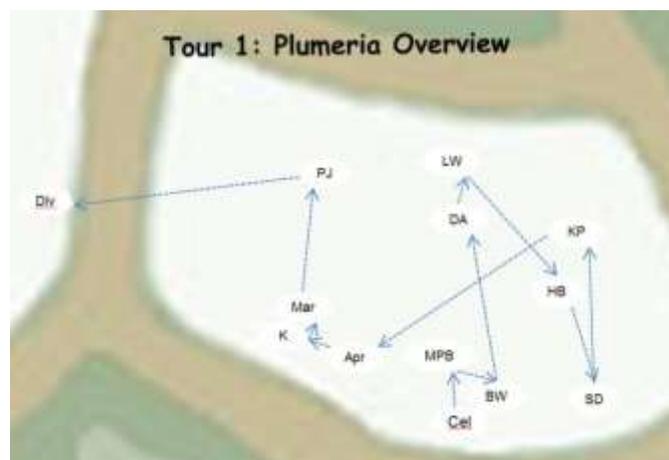
How did the grove start? The original trees were a 2010-11 donation from the late Arturo Martinez, who missed its fragrance in his native Cuba. As you wander around, you'll see his trees, primarily Hawaiian varieties, plus a few of his own seedlings.

Why are these plumeria planted in the middle of an oak grove? Think about the weather in the Tropics: hot, humid, rainy summers and warm, dry winters – the opposite of Southern California weather! However, Tallac Knoll does have one thing in common: rich and well-draining soil and a frost free environment. Since cold air sinks, this hill seldom gets killer freezes, allowing the grove to thrive and bloom with surprisingly little water.

Please don't break off branches! Some plumeria are difficult to grow, and damaged trees die when uncaring visitors snap pieces off. An abused tree is sad sight, especially when plumeria are readily available in stores or from friends.

What's planted here? Although most people are familiar with common yellows or white blooms, plumeria come in many colors, scents, sizes and shapes. Let's take a look at some of our favorites from around the world and how they differ from each other.

- **Celadine:** by far the most popular variety in the world, we love her long lasting yellow and white blooms, strong citrus scent, and compact growth. She's the number one choice for first time growers, and



commonly used for leis.

- **Mele Pa Bowman:** this Hawaiian variety is an unusual cross between the common *P. rubra* 'Celadine' and *P. obtusa* 'Singapore', a popular street tree in the tropics. Note her very thick and shiny, blunt tipped leaves, propeller shaped yellow and white blooms, and lemony perfume.
- **Bali Whirl:** sometimes a plant's genetic code becomes corrupted, producing unusual flowers. Originally from a Celadine tree, Bali Whirl is the only known consistent 8-10 petaled flower. The pollen-bearing anthers have mutated to form extra petals.
- **Donald Angus:** this flashy red Hawaiian flower is a sure crowd pleaser, but like many red plumeria, his cuttings are almost impossible to root and must be grafted.
- **Large White:** about 1/3 of the grove is 'No ID' because we don't know their real name or origin, so calling this beauty 'large white' is a perfect name. Like many white plumeria, she's very fragrant, easy to grow and a heavy bloomer.
- **Hilo Beauty:** like most other Hawaiian hybrids, she grows tall, making her red black flowers hard to appreciate. The hotter the temperature, the blacker her blooms.
- **Sundance:** look closely at her blooms, and you'll see that each beautifully striped orange flower curls, or reflexes, back. She has a wonderful spicy scent as well.
- **Krystyna's Pink:** up high you'll see a cluster of bright yellow, not pink, flowers. Like many of the original donated trees, this one was mislabeled. If you see a flower that you recognize, please let us know!
- **Apricot:** plumeria colors respond to temperature - more than any other flowering plant. These lovely flowers vary from red to yellow to orange depending on heat and sunlight.
- **Kimo:** few other varieties are harder to identify by photo alone. Her bloom size, color and even shape vary by temperature, sunlight and fertilizer, and these changes can be very dramatic. Kimo blooms are white, yellow, orange, red, pink, purple, striped, rainbow, blends, solid, or speckled, and the petals can be round or long. Only her excellent ginger-lime fragrance stays the same.
- **Marathon:** most of the grove's trees are *P. rubra* hybrids, but Marathon is a different, but unknown, plumeria species found at Florida's Marathon Key. Note that the leaves are long, thin and heavily ribbed, and the small flowers are white.
- **Purple Jack:** bred in Thailand in the 90s, he was the very first truly purple plumeria, and many of his excellent purple offspring are now on the market.
- **Divine:** in recent years, more and more plumeria have been hybridized to favor a dwarf growth habit. A low growing plumeria's blooms are at eye level, and its small size makes it easier to bring inside during cold weather. Like many other Thai varieties, Divine displays clusters of rounded, very fragrant blooms over a very long season.

How do I get started? Plumeria have 3 basic requirements: very well-draining soil, at least 6 hours of sunlight, and warmth - no frost or freeze,. Before you rush out for cuttings or plants, find other growers in your area and learn from their experiences. Start with an easy to grow, already rooted plant, or root a cutting from an existing tree.

Take your time and stroll through the rest of our grove, and enjoy the many blooms. As more trees are planted, mature and bloom, this walking tour and the other, more in-depth tours will be expanded. Enjoy!