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Why Growth Habit Matters

It's very easy to fall in love with the sumptuous colors and intoxicating fragrance of plumeria flowers. But next time you consider bringing a plant home, consider the importance of its growth habit. Remember, plumeria are trees, and the way it grows is just as varied as the color of the blooms.

When walking through the LA Arboretum's plumeria grove, you'll notice that trees, even though they are roughly the same age, have very different shapes. This tour will help you envision how the mature plant will look in your landscaping.

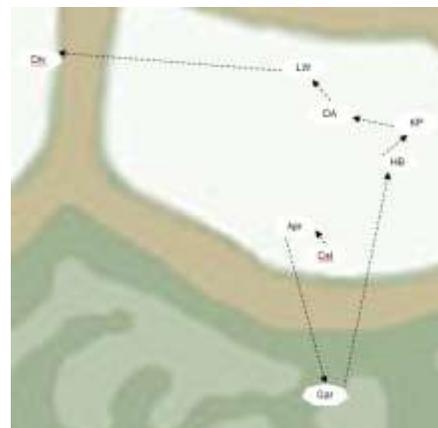
Why does this matter? Since plumeria are grown for their flowers, you want the blooms to be at eye – and nose - level. Lei makers need flowers they can easily reach to pick. Leggy, tall trees make the flowers difficult to appreciate. Poor branching means that you get fewer overall blooms year to year.

Growth habits are miniature, compact, standard and tall. Miniature (also called dwarf) plumeria are well suited to pot culture, and are easy to move or protect when cold weather threatens. Tall varieties are good by walkways where the branches won't interfere with pedestrians, and sprawling plumeria trees work well next to buildings.

The more tips, the more flowers! Plumeria bloom on last year's branch tips, and sometimes in the current year's new tips. These new tips are created either after flowering at the base of the flower stalk, or after branches are pruned. Good branching produces 3-5 new tips; poor branching produces 1-2 new tips; some varieties will not branch after pruning, and the pruned branch dies back to the main stem.

Let's take a look at some examples. Please remember that our trees are not yet full size, and as the years go by, some will grow as tall as a 2 story house, and sometimes just as wide. Others will grow into low, dense shrubs.

Each stop describes two important factors: the height and width of a mature tree, called 'growth habit', and its ability to create new branches after either blooming or pruning, called 'branching'. This genetic attribute is fixed - a tall tree will always grow tall, a sprawling tree will grow wide.



- **Celadine:** there are many reasons that Celadine is the most popular plumeria tree in the world. In addition to the long lasting and very fragrant blooms, the growth habit is compact. After flowering or pruning, the tip divides into 2, 3 or 4 tips. Celadine is considered an excellent brancher, and as a result, she produces massive quantities of blooms year after year. This variety will eventually produce a very large, flower-covered canopy up to 2 stories high.
- **Apricot:** this tree is a standard – notice how high the flowers are. Look among the branches and you'll see evidence of cut branches. The grove's volunteers prune the trees every spring to force branching and to lower the overall height of this tree. This tree is a poor brancher, and each tip only produces 1 or 2 new tips.
- **Gardena:** this small, well branched tree is very compact. Make no mistake – over time, she will grow into a full sized tree. Due to her excellent branching habit, she is always covered in lilac-scented blooms.
- **Hilo Beauty:** look high in the sky to see Hilo Beauty's flowers – she's a very tall grower. Why haven't we pruned her to bring the canopy down? Because Hilo Beauty doesn't like to branch, and after pruning the cut branch dies.
- **Krystyna's Pink:** like Hilo Beauty, Krystyna is a very tall and very vertical grower. Fortunately, she responds fairly well to pruning by producing several new branches. However, these new branches are just like the rest of the tree – long and tall. With careful pruning, we hope to bring the canopy down low enough for you to actually see the flowers! One branch will remain untouched, allowing you to see the difference.
- **Donald Angus:** this red rainbow has a very nice, classic standard shape and good branching. If you look carefully, you'll see that bloom color on the shady side has a different intensity than the sunny side – a consideration when planting this tree.
- **Large White:** this broad but low growing tree has a classic sprawling habit – she simply wants to grow sideways. Since plumeria leaves are quite heavy, we've added lots of support to prevent damage during wind storms. We've pruned her several times, but she retains her horizontal growth habit. Fortunately, this means her fragrant blooms are always easy to appreciate.
- **Divine:** a classic miniature plumeria, she produces 2, 3, or 4 new tips after blooming, and these new branches become shorter and shorter as she matures. Over time, she will look like a flower covered dome, staying close to ground level.

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.

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 other, more in-depth tours will be expanded. Enjoy!