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Why are Plumeria grafted?

The vast majority of plumeria are propagated by rooting a cutting. However, this is not the only way to produce a new plant from an existing one. Like many woody plants, piece of plumeria can be permanently attached, or grafted, to another plumeria!

The technique used for plumeria grafting is a very similar to grafting of other woody herbaceous plants, such as apple trees or roses. A well-established host plant, called rootstock, receives a new branch or tip, called a scion, and the scion becomes a new branch. Scions retain their growth and blooming characteristics – if you graft a dwarf variety onto a tall grower, the graft will continue to grow as a dwarf. The opposite is true – if you graft a tall variety onto a compact grower, you'll create a very strange, lopsided tree!

Graft unions do leave a scar. Don't worry though; new wood will grow around it, making it inconspicuous. Do not, however, bury the graft by planting it below ground! Plumeria roots are fairly shallow and need air - deep planting adversely affects the tree's health.

In general, plumeria are grafted for one of four reasons

1. **Jump Start:** gives a cutting an early start on the season by grafting it onto a unbranched seedling. Instead of developing its own roots, it takes advantage of the rootstock's more mature root system and grows into a tree.
2. **Hard to root:** grow a variety that does not produce its own roots, or is extremely difficult to root.
3. **Emergency graft:** save a cutting too small to root on its own, or save an inflo.
4. **Rainbow Tree:** create a tree that displays several colors on its branches.

Jump start

Since seedlings have a strong root system and a tap root, two year old plumeria seedlings are often used as the rootstock, and the scion is grafted onto it. The scion uses the host's mature root system to grow instead of putting its energy into roots. It will bloom sooner and produce better flowers than a newly rooted cutting. You'll also notice a few grove trees with graft scars near the base – they were cuttings grafted onto rootstock.

Hard to root varieties

Some plumeria varieties are difficult or impossible to root, and must be grafted onto another plumeria. If you try to root one yourself, it either rots or produces roots so weak that the plant takes many years to bloom. Very high rooting failure rates are common problem with red hybrids and a few species. Some examples are:

- Donald Angus Red
- Kimo
- P. stenopetala

Emergency graft

Occasionally we have a piece of a cutting that is very small and does not have enough energy to produce its own roots. This is often the case when a cutting starts to rot, and only the tip is viable. To save it, we graft it onto another tree or rootstock. After the branch gains enough strength and grows to a reasonable size, the branch is cut off and rooted.

Rainbow Tree

When your garden space is limited, or you like a bit of novelty, you can graft several varieties on a single tree. Before you grab your grafting knife, consider these extremely important guidelines for selecting scions, and the consequences of ignoring them.

- It's very important to match the growth habits of your scions. Taking a scion from a tall variety and grafting it onto a compact host will not make the scion become compact. It will simply grow lengthy, and you'll have a very awkward looking tree.
- Equally important is the scion's vigor, or the growth speed plus the inherent health. A strong scion will dominate the rootstock, and the other scions will stop blooming.

Learning grafting

Many plumeria clubs, such as the local South Coast Plumeria Society, sponsor demonstrations on grafting techniques. There are also excellent ebooks and online tutorials.



Grafting Demonstration Area

In this corner of the grove, we selected a beautifully shaped compact tree with drab flowers for our host. Starting in 2015, we V-grafted many different types of scions onto its branches to show both good and bad practices.

1. **Alice:** these scions are dwarf, compact (preferred) and tall – see if you can spot them. Over time, you'll see the ill effects of poorly chosen scions. If nothing else, it will become an interesting tree!
2. **Paleface:** look carefully at the base of this No ID tree - about a foot above the ground you'll see a V-shaped graft scar from when the cutting was grafted onto a seedling.
3. **My Love:** this seedling has a lanky growth habit and rather plain shell-shaped flowers. Look for a slant graft, which is a different technique from a V graft.

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!