

Easy and Effective Way to Grow Plumerias

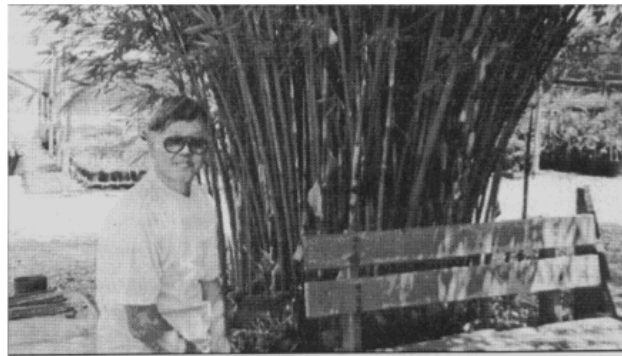
Ampol Orrungroj
May 20, 2018

The beginning

Ampol Nursery

- Started 31 years ago
- No prior background in commercial growing
- Started by buying and reselling plants from friends in the nursery business

Photo credit: Roland Dubuc, 2003



Ampol sitting near one of his specimen bamboos.

When I started a nursery business in San Marcos about 31 years ago, I didn't have any background in growing commercial plants, so we struggled badly. I started to buy houseplants from a neighboring nursery and sell them to all of my commercial customers. I always compared all my nursery friends to see how well they did quality wise, so I always picked up the best quality plants even if the price was higher.

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After delivering plants to the commercial customers, I always took time to look at their nursery stock to see all the wonderful plants. If I spotted any plants that were nice and different, I would purchase them and start my collection. And if my wife happened to see them more and more...I just told her "Oh, they are all very cheap".

😊

First plants

- Started with Gasterias and Sansevierias
- Became largest grower & supplier - over 30 varieties
- Optimized greenhouse temperature and humidity
- Developed soil mix and fertilizer system for succulents



Gasteria



Sansevieria

I collected sansevierias (some people call them snake plants or mother in law's tongue) and also gasterias and plumerias. I got more than 30 different sansevierias and gasteria. And they grew and multiplied very fast inside the large, temperature controlled greenhouse. With good soil mix and a good fertilizer system, we became the biggest grower and supplier of sansevierias and gasterias.

Lifelong love of plumeria



From red plumerias in Thailand...



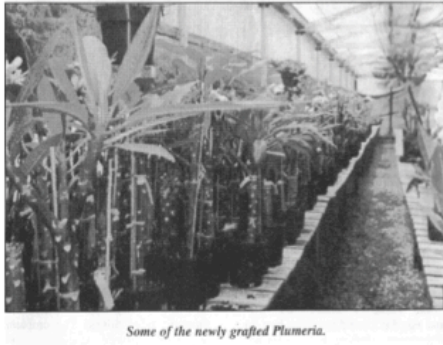
to Celadines in Point Loma

As a small boy in Thailand, I used to see them grow and admired the fragrance that filled the air underneath the dark red plumeria trees. Until we moved to San Diego and started the nursery business, I didn't see them in the U.S. One day after delivering houseplants to Walter Andersen Nursery in Point Loma (anybody ever been to Walter Andersen Nursery?) I saw they had a few 5 gallon size plumerias with yellow flowers and a nice fragrance. The name was Hawaiian Yellow or Celadine. I bought one right away and told my wife "It was very cheap". ☺ I kept buying plumerias until I met Jim Clark, a plumeria grower in Fallbrook. I bought lots of plumerias from him to sell to all my customers almost every week. At the same time, my collection of plumerias was growing very fast, because of our soil mix and fertilizer. We grew all plumerias in black plastic containers, which have several drainage holes. We always left lots of room on the top for watering them.

One day I visited an outdoor flowering basket plants grower in Fallbrook. He told me he used Epsom salt mixed into his fertilizing system to water all his outdoor plants. In the middle of the Summer heat wave, his flower baskets didn't burn at all because the Epsom salt has magnesium sulfate, which promotes chlorophyll in the leaves and makes them healthy and strong.

When I came back, I started to mix Epsom salt into my system and watered all my plants. Since then, all my plumerias and other plants don't have sunburned leaves again. I always listen to other growers' ideas and am not afraid to adjust.

Propagation



- As a commercial grower, rooting cuttings and growing them to a good size took too long
- Needed a way to multiply the plumerias faster
- Successfully developed a plumeria grafting technique
- Life was exciting again!

Grafting bench

Photo credit: Roland Dubuc, 2003

I started to propagate my plumerias, but it seemed like I'd have to wait forever for the cutting to root and grow to a good size. I had to figure out how to multiply them faster by grafting them onto any strong rootstock, or any strong plants. Luckily the grafting was successful and made life exciting again.

Grafting - Walter Andersen's and Beyond



V Graft



Roland Graft



Roland Graft - Closeup

My first plumeria grafting demonstration at Walter Andersen Nursery in Point Loma drew a lot of plumeria lovers. They only had chairs enough for half of the people who attended. After the class, I met Ken Ames, who was a big plumeria lover and later became a President of the San Diego Plumeria Society. He invited me to visit his plumeria garden in La Jolla. Later he moved to Jamul, where he had more room and more heat to grow more plumeria. He always came to visit Ampol Nursery to

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learn about grafting and liquid fertilizer. He always bought a lot of my potting soil mix. Through the years, he brought many outstanding plumeria cuttings to share with me. I am very grateful to have outstanding plumeria from friends like Bud Guillot, Jim Clark, Ken Ames, Carl and Joy Herzog, Mary and Sam Peebles, Dawn Sullivan, Maler from Upland Nursery and many more friends. I also bought plumeria cuttings from Jim Little in Hawaii.

Ampol Nursery Soil Mix

- Nursery soil mix - large quantity and complicated
- Needed a smaller quantity, simpler mix for residential use

PLANTING MIX	
4 bales Coconut Fiber (Coconut Fiber is sold in bales that are about 2 feet X 10 inches in size. They are compressed bales that are soaked in water prior to their use in this mix.)	fertilizer 12-12-12 6 pounds of Apex fertilizer 14-14-14
1 four cubic bag of Peat Moss	3 pounds Dolomite
2 four cubic bags of perlite	3 pounds Calcium Carbonate
6 three cubic bags of Gromulch	3 pounds Iron Sulfate
2 three cubic bags of Turf N Tee	5 pounds Soil Sulfur (this helps bring down the PH level, he likes to keep his PH at 6 - 6.2.)
8 five gallon buckets of white sand	Source: Plumeria World July/August 2003 Roland Dubuc
5 pounds of Kellogg All Purpose	

At the nursery, we mixed a lot of soil mix at a time. We used Kellogg's GroMulch, which contains manure and compost, to mix with peat moss, perlite, coir, redwood compost and sands. We used it on everything from agave to plumerias. Everything would grow like crazy.

Residential Soil Mix - Container Plants

- Start with Kellogg's Garden Soil (\$6.47 at Home Depot)
OR Sta-Green Flower and Vegetable Garden Soil
- Add 15% Perlite
- Add 5% Chicken Manure (\$3.17 at Home Depot)
- Add 5% Play Sand (\$5.30 at Home Depot)
- Add all purpose fertilizer granules



OR



Plus



Now I've sold my business and moved to a house in Oceanside where I have a small back yard. I don't have the luxury of many materials to mix the potting soils. So I start with Kellogg's Garden Soils mix or Flower and Vegetable garden soils.

I mixed the garden soil with 15% of perlite, 5% of chicken manure and 5% of play sand, plus some all purpose fertilizer granules to grow plumerias and all outdoor plants. I also use them to plant plumeria cuttings, which are doing very well. Throughout the year, I always look at plumerias from other growers to compare with my plumeria plants...looking, looking for a pointer to improve my own plants. I used to read books about growing plumerias in containers. None of them mentioned adding manure mix to the soils. But I know one thing about tropical plants...they all love some amount of manure mixed into their diet.

Residential Soil Mix - In Ground Plants

- Start with Kellogg's Raised Bed & Potting Mix
- Add 30% Kellogg's GroMulch



In the ground, I mixed about 30% Kellogg's GroMulch into the existing garden soil to grow everything. All the plants looked happy until we got frost twice this year. Most plumerias in the ground got frost damage, I'm going to be very busy saving them by grafting pieces of undamaged tips onto healthy plants.

Watering - Containers

- Allowing soil to dry between waterings allows oxygen to penetrate root zone
- Roots use oxygen to cook food for the plant
- Water enough to leach salt from the container
- Tilt container on 2x4 to allow water to drain



Watering is one of the most important things to grow plumerias and other plants. Most plants prefer the soil to be dry between waterings. When soils are on the dry side, it allows oxygen from the air to penetrate the root zone. The roots use oxygen in the process of cooking food for the whole plant. Just make sure they are not bone dry. Every time you water, make sure you water enough to leach out the salt from your container.

Watering - Outdoors in Spring and Summer

- Move plants outdoors at the end of March
- Water established plants once per week
- Water new plumerias once every 2 weeks or longer
- Slow growers in containers: tilt container on 2x2 or 2x4, stop watering until soil dries up
- In hot summer weather, water only twice per week

Spend less time, use less water and get healthier plumerias!

When I grew plumerias at the nursery in San Marcos, we put all the plants in the greenhouse on the second week of December, after we sold all the poinsettias. Since we also grew other houseplants, we set the minimum temperature at 60 degrees Fahrenheit at night. Then we continued to water them with fertilizer so the plumeria didn't drop their leaves at all. At the same time, we potted up rooted plumeria cuttings that we gang rooted in perlite. We watered them once and kept them on the dry side. When they started to grow, they got water once a month. For any plants that grew slower than the whole group, I sat the slower growers with one side on a piece of 2x2 or 2x4 to drain out more water from the pots. This allowed oxygen to penetrate to the roots. Any friends who visited the nursery would recognize those 2x2s laying around on the table.

In early Spring time, usually the end of March, we moved all the plumerias outside. I let our worker water the old established plants once a week. I myself watered all the new plants. Why? This is critical. All new plumerias need water less often, Let's say every 2 weeks or longer. I put pots of all the new plants that were slower growers resting with one side on a 2x2 or 2x4, and stopped watering them until the soil dried up. This way they caught up with the rest very quickly. Any time you question if they need water, just skip the water for another watering session. This way all the plumerias in my care never died on me. In the middle of the heat wave in San Marcos Summer, we watered plumeria only twice a week.

Look at it this way: you spend less time, use less water, and your plumerias are healthier.

Conclusion

- Plumerias are easy to grow and care for
- People kill them with love
- Grow the way they like and they will be healthy and happy

Plumerias are relatively easy to grow and care for. Some people are killing them with love. So try to grow them the way they like, not the way we like.