



Hibiscus Care

The Hibiscus is an elegant blooming plant ever increasing in popularity in Texas, whether it be container grown around decks, porches and patios or used in landscape settings as annual color. While individual flowers may last only a day or so, especially in hot summers, many new buds are produced daily from Spring through Fall for a flower show second only to the rose in Brazos Valley gardens.

First classified by Linnaeus in *Species Plantarum* (1753) as 'Hibiscus rosa-sinensis', the hibiscus cited was probably the double red which had wide distribution throughout China, India, South-East Asia and the Pacific Islands. While the double red was known since the 1600s it was only later, after Linnaeus' first observations, that a single red form of the hibiscus was included in written descriptions. Singles were considered rare during these early days until introduced into Europe from the South Indian Ocean.

By the early decades of the 19th century, however, the hibiscus had made its way into the greenhouse of Europe as other forms were discovered and cultivars made by early plantmen. Most of these early forms were still originating from Asia and the South Pacific, and as early as 1820, Charles Telfair began crossing the Mauritius island native *H. Liliiflorus* with older forms of *H. rosa-sinensis*. By 1900 hybridizing had begun in Hawaii, India, Ceylon, Fiji and Florida.

There are literally hundreds of varieties now grown with more introduced each year. The glossy green foliage varies considerably in size and texture and the range of colors seems to know no limits. We now have brown, green, gray, and maroon as well as violets, reds, oranges, yellows and pinks through to white. Many have multi-color combinations. Size ranges from 2-3 inch miniatures to the dinner plate size of the mallow, or *H. Moscheutos*, varieties. There are three chapters of the American Hibiscus Society in Texas, with Houston being the first and largest membership outside of Florida.

Very popular for decoration since they need not be placed in water to prevent wilting, about the only objection to hibiscus flowers in

arrangements is that they last only one day especially in the hot summer. For an evening party, try this tip: Pick the blooms in the morning just as they are opening and place in a sealed plastic bag. Refrigerate until about one or two hours before the party when you can take them out, place them where you want them, and let them open on their own. Now they will last all evening!

FERTILIZING

It has been said that a well fertilized plant is the best therapy for combating insects and disease. Growers who provide routine care for their hibiscus experience few problems. Feed hibiscus starting with the instructions found on the label of the fertilizer you select.

Hibiscus Fertilizer is a special fertilizer specifically formulated to provide all the necessary plant food elements for successful hibiscus growing. The low phosphate content provides enough phosphorus for bloom, but does not have an excess amount which would tie up trace elements such as magnesium. The potassium is derived from nitrate of potash which has no chlorides which are detrimental to hibiscus. Most fertilizers use the less expensive muriate of potash which is high in chlorides. Know specifically what your fertilizer contains. This is more important to container grown hibiscus as fluids move through the confined soil mix and are not dissipated in the ground surrounding plants which are grown in the earth.

Water again if a dry fertilizer is used. It is preferable to feed plants at cooler times of the day, morning is ideal. Remember, the more watering you need to do in hot weather, the more often fertilizing may be needed.

INSECTS AND DISEASES

With its lush tropical foliage, hibiscus in your yard could provide a great meal for hungry insects. **BE SURE TO READ THE INSECTICIDE LABEL FIRST AND FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY.**

For cabbage loopers, cut worms and other worms, use Bio-Worm Killer or Sevin. Use Bug and Snail Bait for snails and slugs. For insects such as scale, mealy bugs, aphids, white fly

and thrips, use General Spray, DiSyston or Ortho Orthene. (DO NOT use malathion)

For fungal problems ask an Heirloom Gardens Texas Certified Nursery Professional for recommendations regarding your situation.

PRUNING

Prepare early for freezing weather and protect plants when temperatures are expected to drop below 32 degrees or when there is a danger of frost.

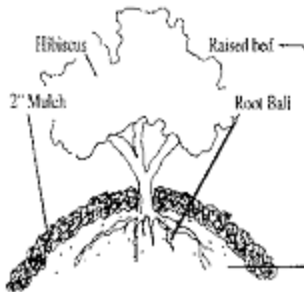
PLANTED IN GROUND: Cut hibiscus bushes back before first freeze to 4 to 6 inches above

ground level. Cover hibiscus completely with pine needle mulch. This will give your plants a chance to survive a mild Brazos Valley winter. In the spring after danger of freeze has passed, rake mulch away from trunk to allow plants to sprout freely.

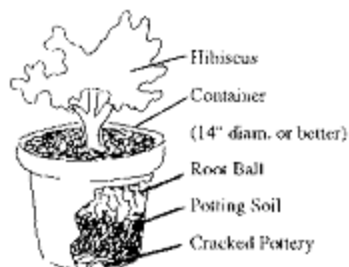
CONTAINERIZED PLANTS: When hibiscus are being grown in containers, prune to shape in late January or February to assure ample spring blooms, as hibiscus bloom on new wood. Prune to shape or control size of plant at any time.

PLANT IT RIGHT!

Shown below is a hibiscus planted in a sunny location (at least 6 hours per day). The bed has been prepared and raised for good drainage. Blend approximately 14 bags of azalea planting mix per 100 sq ft of existing soil. Add the appropriate amount (according to instructions) of hibiscus fertilizer. A pre-emergent herbicide like Eptam, Balan or Surflan will prevent most weeds from germinating, and pine bark mulch will insulate the roots, retain moisture, and also help control weeds.



If planting hibiscus in a pot, we recommend that any container used be at least 14 inches in diameter, with holes in the bottom for drainage. Use cracked pottery to cover the hole, but still allow adequate water drainage then fill the blooming tropical soil mix blended with the appropriate amount of hibiscus fertilizer.



Fertilize every 3 to 4 weeks with hibiscus fertilizer. Especially designed for the Brazos Valley's soil and weather conditions, our 10-4-12 formula with added sulphur, iron, and trace elements will give you healthier hibiscus plants with bigger and better blooms.