

Clare's Garden

By Clare La Puma Corre

Why I Garden

I have a garden for many reasons. Besides the obvious reasons of sustenance and of enjoying the pleasure derived from being surrounded by beauty, nature, color, texture, and fragrance, gardening fills the senses and soothes the soul. It seems to fill a need which seemingly can't be filled by anything else. There is a sense of accomplishment when one creates something that wasn't there before, whether one creates a vegetable garden from a previously vacant piece of land or plants a small tree started from seed which will reach great heights in the years to come. There is also a sense of self-sufficiency when one harvests the fruits of one's labor.

I feel closer to God and to His creatures when I am in the garden. I feel a sense of peace when I am surrounded by plant life and by other life forms. I enjoy the solitude that I often find there. Gardening can add meaning to one's life, and its end result is often to make the world a better place to be. It provides food and shelter for body and soul for human beings and for the well-being of many life forms. It is an act of giving to the earth and to one's surroundings, but the benefits received in return are tremendous. A beautiful garden is inviting and rewarding for all.



Michelia x alba flower



Basket of Freesia



Michelia figo var. skinneriana



Dichorisandra thyrsiflora 'Blue Ginger'

What I Don't Grow

At first, I wanted to grow everything and anything. That wasn't a good idea. But like so many things, gardening is a learning experience that is ever changing, and there are often limitations such as growing space, money, time for proper care, and climate.

I am blessed to live in a favorable climate which does not freeze, and I can grow many things in the ground all year long which cannot be grown in many parts of the country with the exception of South Florida and Hawaii, but my area is not considered tropical, and whether it is subtropical is probably debatable.

One of my first lessons in gardening was this: just because you *can* grow it, doesn't mean you *should* grow it! There are many plants and vines out there which can become invasive in climates which have mild winters and other areas as well. A few examples of this include *Ipomoea indica* (Perennial Morning Glory), some *Passiflora* species (Passionflower), *Campsis radicans* (a type of Trumpet Vine), certain species of *Lonicera* (Honeysuckle), *Schinus molle* (Pepper tree), and *Sapium sebiferum* (Chinese Tallow); although, some of these can be grown in containers and confined spaces. Here's another lesson I learned: if it pops up in your garden spontaneously, it is probably invasive and shouldn't be kept! Keeping an invasive and aggressively self-propagating plant or tree or vine in one's garden can create an endless amount of work for you and others. Been there; done that!



Louisiana Iris 'Black Gamecock'



Passiflora amethystina hybrid



Passiflora macrocarpa



Rosemary in flower

What I Do Grow

I have a lot of blue and purple flowers in my garden, combined with yellow, orange, and white flowers if I can manage it. There is something about those color combinations which is soothing to me. I also grow many things because they are pleasantly fragrant, and I grow flowers which will attract butterflies and hummingbirds. I grow for beauty as well, but fragrance is a high priority in my garden.

Some of my favorite blue and purple flowers include *Passiflora macrocarpa*, *Passiflora* 'Lavender Lady,' a *Passiflora amethystina* hybrid that I grew from seed, *Passiflora platyloba*, *Duranta erecta*, *Wisteria floribunda* 'Violacea Plena' and 'Royal Purple,' *Millettia reticulata* (Evergreen Wisteria), *Ceanothus* (California Lilac), *Plumbago*, *Rosemary*, *Lavender*, *Alyogyne huegelii* (Blue Hibiscus), *Tibouchina* (Princess Flower), *Nepeta* (Cat Mint), *Thunbergia battiscombei*, *Brunfelsia* (Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow), *Dalechampia dioscoreifolia* vine (Bow Tie Vine), *Hardenbergia violacea* 'Happy Wanderer,' *Hebe*, *Coleus*, *Blue Felicia* (Blue Marguerite), *Buddleia* (Butterfly Bush), *Dichorisandra thyrsiflora* (Blue Ginger), *Louisiana Iris* 'Black Gamecock,' *Petrea volubilis* (Sandpaper Vine), *Praecox arcticus* (Creeping Thyme), *Salvia* (Mexican Sage), *Perovskia* (Russian Sage), and *Bignonia* (Trumpet Vine). Chives also grow nice purple flowers and are a must-have in my edible garden.

I have some small collections, and they are only relatively small due to lack of space! Some of the things of which I have more than one species or cultivar include the following: *Plumeria*, *Adenium*, *Caesalpinia*, *Michelia*, *Cananga*, *Wisteria*, *Brugmansia*, *Datura*, *Brunfelsia*, *Bouvardia*, *Passiflora*, *Syringa*, *Buddleia*, *Hylocereus*, *Jasminum*, *Gardenia*, *Hedychium*, *Hebe*, *Osmanthus*, *Canna*, *Iris*, *Salvia*, *Epiphyllum* species and hybrids, and *Sarcococca*. Some of those collections have some of my favorite fragrances, and I also grow these plants for fragrance: *Lavender*, *Rosemary*, *Freesia*, *Tuberose*, *Aglaia*, *Stephanotis*, *Formosa Lily*, *Tabernaemontana*, *Roses*, *Duranta*, *Hoya odorata*, *Fagraea berteriana*, *Ipomoea alba* (Moonflower Vine), *Murraya*, *Praecox arcticus* (Pink Thyme), and *Telosma cordata* (Pakalana Vine).



Duranta erecta



Close-up of *Hardenbergia* Vine



Hebe flowers



Wisteria sinensis 'Texas White'



Hardenbergia violacea 'Happy Wanderer'



Manglietia insignis

Books and sources that I can recommend include:

Dave's PlantFiles on the Internet;
The Essential Gardener by Derek Fell;
Western Garden Book by Kathleen Norris Brenzel (Editor);
New Complete Guide to Gardening (Better Homes & Gardens) by Susan A. Roth, Better Homes and Gardens Books (Editor);
Brugmansia and Datura: Angel's Trumpets and Thorn Apples by Ulrike Preissel, Hans-Georg Preissel;
Sunset Western Landscaping Book by Fiona Gilseman;
Wisterias: A Comprehensive Guide by Peter Valder; and,
The Handbook of Plumeria Culture (Flowering Tropicals for American Gardens Series) -- by Richard Eggenberger.



Dalechampia discoraefolia 'Bow Tie Vine' growing with Bougainvillea

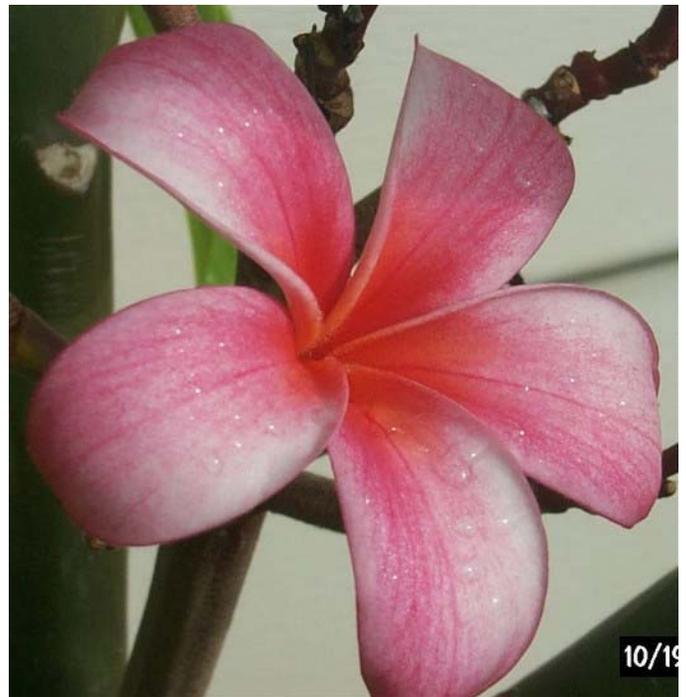
Plumerias

Of all the things that I grow, plumerias have to be one of my favorite trees for beauty, color, fragrance, and ease of growing. I have only been growing plumerias for a couple of years now, and so there are others that are much more qualified to impart wisdom concerning their care. I can, however, share with you my limited growing experience with them in my climate.

Since it doesn't freeze where I live, I can grow my plumerias outdoors all year long. I do see an occasional lower leaf which turns yellow and drops, but in general, my plumerias retain their leaves throughout the winter. The only plumeria which slowly dropped one leaf at a time until it was bare by February was a red named 'Duke.' I attribute the lack of leaf drop to the fact that I water a couple of times a week in the winter and have a warm microclimate in my back yard. The three-quarter rock which replaced the grass, the aluminum siding along the house, a six-foot brick retaining wall, and two Koi Ponds with a waterfall all offer something to my growing environment; specifically, these things serve as wind breaks and absorb heat during the day and radiate it at night. Since the sun comes out on most days during the winter and since the temps are frequently in the 60's, 70's, and even higher at times, there is plenty of heat to keep them growing throughout the winter.

I think that there is some misconception about dormancy. This is a good link that I found which explains dormancy: <http://www.cnr.vt.edu/dendro/forestbiology/htmltext/chapter6.htm> This link explains that dormancy is triggered by the longer nights in winter, colder temperatures, and the withholding of water and nutrition. I believe that all these elements have to be present for true dormancy, and since my plumerias continue to be watered and since nighttime temperatures rarely dip down below 40 degrees, my plumerias do not go dormant. They do stop flowering in early winter on older inflorescences, but new inflorescences continue to grow as do new leaves.

I do have some other tropicals which don't like any temperatures below 50 degrees so I have a portable greenhouse set up for those, and since there is room,



Cancun Dreams



Spidery Pink



Celadine and Duranta erecta

I also have plumerias in there as well.



Three separate pictures of the inside the greenhouse

The portable greenhouse is one that I purchased from Harbor Freight Tools and cost less than \$100. It is a heavy plastic cover over a PVC-pipe frame, and bricks line the bottom where the cover meets the rock bottom. Inside the greenhouse are an oil-radiant heater and a grow light called Wonderlite along with two fans. The greenhouse contains two *Cananga odorata* trees, *Passiflora macrocarpa*, *Adenium* seedlings and grafts, young plumeria seedlings, plumeria cuttings which are rooting or just-rooted, newly grafted plumerias, some plumerias with inflorescences, and a few other tropical plants and vines. I find that the plants inside love the intense heat during the daytime as long as they remain well-watered. The humidity also helps to keep leaves from drying out. The most important thing that I have running in the greenhouse is the fan. I have a small fan inside and a large one, and the large one is running all the time. I find that air circulation is very important to keep aphids, mites, fungus gnats, algae, and rust at bay.



Plumerias lined up against the house



Plumerias against the brick retaining wall in the backyard



Plumerias in late August



All photos were taken by Clare of plants in Clare's Garden.

