

From Paula Pugh Schipp ~ Vice President ~ Frangipani Society of Australia

WHY GROW FRANGIPANI TREES FROM SEED?

I am often asked this question, as I am an avid seed collector and grower myself, and have been for a number of years. Actually there are lots and lots of good reasons to grow frangipani from seed, and below are just a few facts regarding this hobby that you may not know.

✧ Given the right conditions, they grow **much, much faster** than cuttings. This is because they start off their life with a proper root system, so can feed themselves from the word go. Cuttings take some time to root, especially at certain times of the year, like when going into dormancy. A cutting can sit there looking fine, because it can 'feed' from itself for months, and will show signs of new life at the tip, even shooting up what appears to be a healthy inflorescence, prior to flowering. Then, for no reason it will die, and you will wonder what you've done wrong. Well, perhaps you've given it too much water and it's rotted. This means that it will die at the base or from part of the way up the stem (goes dark and squishy-looking) because without a root system it cannot 'drink' properly. Perhaps, though, you've done nothing at all that you can blame yourself for. It just never made a root system in time to become viable. You'll find no root system at the base when you finally dispose of it

✧ Australians spend many thousands of dollars annually, importing different varieties from overseas, when these new varieties are simply hybrids, created from seed themselves, once upon a time. In fact, with a bit of forethought, time and effort, we could be creating some fantastic new varieties right here in Australia, to be admired by (and sold to) other frangi-lovers around the world, for years to come.

✧ A single seed, planted at the right time, and given the right conditions, can grow to a metre tall in its first year of life.

✧ Blooms can be expected from around two years onwards, from the hardy varieties like Aussie Common White and Aussie Common Pink (my pinks always used to flower in the second year). The shortest period I've had from seed to flower so far is 1 year and four months, but blooms were tiny. I get many blooming in under two years, thanks to our mild Carnarvon winters, and other new growers in our society are also getting blooms in under two years, now. You can also wait longer than this though, so remember this is a 'pot luck' situation, when growing from seed. Another FSA member who lives in the south-west of WA (Mandurah) is currently getting blooms on frangipani grown from seed only 2 ½ years ago, with great results so far.

✧ Every single frangipani flower has both male and female reproductive organs!

✧ Frangipani have more pairs of chromosomes than us humans!

✧ Seeds from a single pod can produce quite different plants, in fact they do, all the time for me. That's part of the excitement - seeing what you get. Some will grow more rapidly than others, even though planted in the same planter, in the same conditions, growing side by side, from the same single seed pod...amazing! Very briefly, this is because with open pollination, the pollinator, may either transfer pollen from the male 'antler' to the female stigma of the floret within the same single bloom, or bring pollen from a different frangipani growing nearby. So we can get self-pollination within the bloom, or cross-pollination from bloom to bloom. The pollinator could be a bee, a small spider, even a tiny hummingbird or certain type of moth in some places.

The following paragraph is a quote from Richard and Mary Helen Eggenberger's excellent book 'THE HANDBOOK ON PLUMERIA CULTURE' (page 56) regarding the plus side of growing frangipani from seed.

*"Seeds are easily handled and a large number of plants can be started in a small space with relatively little expense. Most important is the fact that **all new cultivars must be produced from seed**. Plumeria seedlings have more variability than any plant we know. Plant twenty seeds from the same pod and you are likely to get twenty different combinations of colour, size and form, some resembling the female parent, others exhibiting totally different characteristics. If you have collected seeds from a superior parent with a number of desirable qualities such as size, colour, shape, fragrance, and substance, you have an excellent chance of producing a hybrid of merit..."*
(Plumeria is the correct botanical name for frangipani)