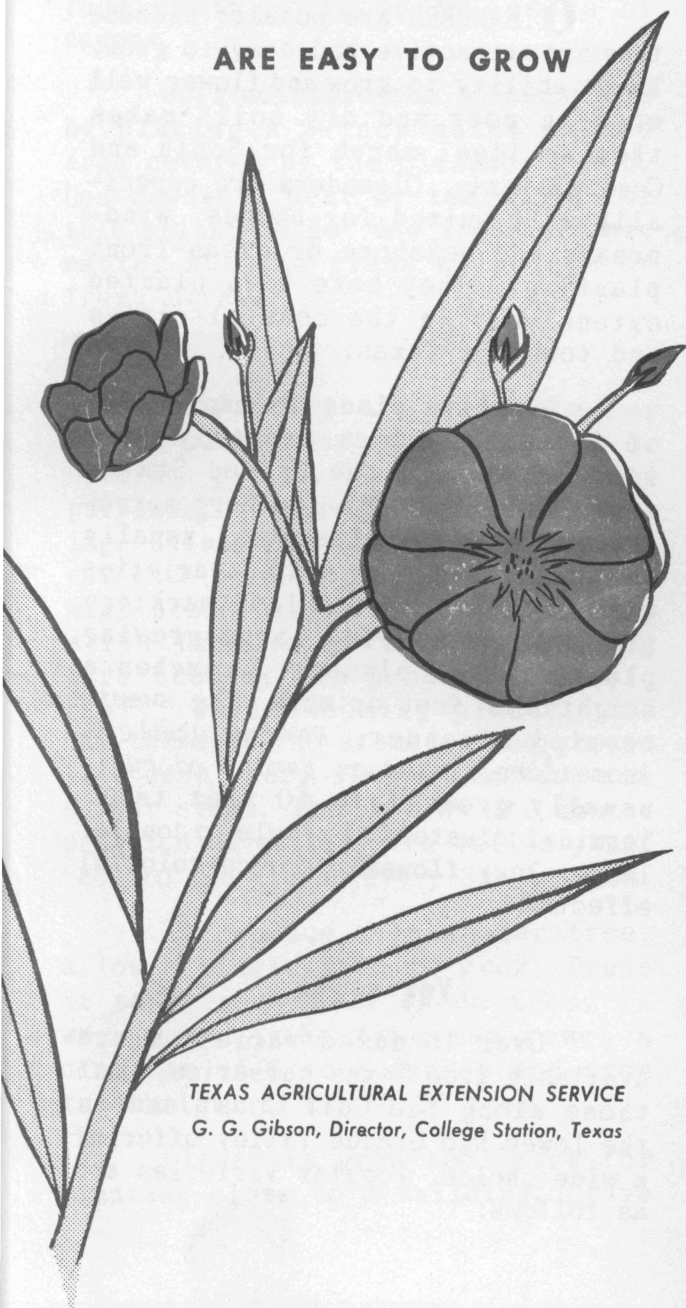


*Mrs. Dot Holland*

**L-317**

# *Oleanders*

**ARE EASY TO GROW**



TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE  
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# Oleanders

## Are Easy To Grow

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**O**LEANDERS are popular because they are attractive and easy to grow. Their ability to grow and flower well even in poor and dry soils makes them an ideal shrub for South and Central Texas. Oleanders are especially well suited for hedges, wind-breaks and seashore or ocean-front plantings. They have been planted extensively in the coastal cities and towns of Texas.

A native plant in many parts of Asia, oleanders probably were introduced into the United States from Asia Minor. The leathery narrow leaves, 6 to 8 inches long, usually are dark green. Variegated varieties with yellow or white leaf markings are available. The large-growing plant, *Nerium oleander*, reaches a height of 20 feet or more. The sweet-scented oleander, *Nerium indicum* (sometimes listed as *Nerium odorum*), usually grows 8 to 10 feet tall. Terminal clusters of single to double, large showy flowers produce colorful effects.

### Varieties

Over 15 named varieties are available from Texas nurseries, with those along the Gulf Coast and in the Lower Rio Grande Valley offering a wide choice. Popular varieties are as follows:

**PINK**

Apple Blossom  
Double Rose Pink  
Sealy Pink

**BRIGHT RED**

Single Red  
Cherry Ripe  
Compte Barthelemy  
Jannoch

**YELLOW**

Double Yellow

**DWARF SALMON-PINK**

Mrs. Roeding

**WHITE**

Sister Agnes  
Single White

The double-flowering varieties are more showy when in bloom than the single-flowering, but mature and dried flowers need to be picked frequently to keep the plants attractive. The single flowers usually drop off as they mature.

**New Plants Easily Grown**

Oleander cuttings made from mature hardened stems form roots quickly almost any time. Those made from the soft growth on the tips of the stems are harder to root. Flowers form during spring and summer. Cuttings made as soon as the plant has bloomed usually root better than at any other time of the year.

Place the cuttings in water, sand, peat or soil to root them. Root systems will develop in sand or soil, but cuttings rooted in water must then be placed in a pot of garden soil until root systems form. As soon as the roots have formed and are about 2 inches long, the cuttings can be planted outside in their permanent location. Do not fertilize

newly rooted plants until they have begun to grow, or the cutting may decay. A permanent location in full sun is best since oleanders will produce more blooms than when partially in the shade.

New oleander plants also can be started by separating the sprouts which arise around the older stems of established plants, or by dividing the old plant.

Oleanders can be propagated by seed, but the seedlings may not be like the plant from which the seed was gathered. Because of this variation, it usually is best to multiply oleanders by cuttings or by division of old plants.

For detailed instructions on methods of propagation consult B-816, *Propagation of Ornamental Plants*.

## **General Culture**

### **SOIL**

Oleanders are well adapted to most soils of Texas. They thrive equally well in the western alkaline soils and the eastern sandy soils. Although they will grow and flower satisfactorily in the poorest soils, they do best in well-drained, porous, fertile soil.

Low soil fertility can be corrected with a winter and a spring application of a 5-10-5 fertilizer applied at the rate of 3 pounds to 100 square feet of soil or 1 cup distributed evenly over 25 square feet around the base of a well-established plant.

## WATERING

Oleanders are well adapted to hot, dry weather and can survive drouth, but they bloom heavily only when they have adequate water. If watering is practiced, water heavily once a week during extremely dry periods. The water should penetrate to a depth of 12 to 15 inches or deeper.

Soil moisture can be conserved by placing a 2-inch mulch on the area covered by the oleander's top. Use sawdust, peat or leaf mold for this mulch; do not use fresh organic matter such as grass clippings or fresh straw.

## PRUNING

Oleanders are suitable for screen plantings, natural hedges or specimen plants. When used for these purposes, they require little pruning. Unless the oldest branches are cut back occasionally, however, they will become leggy and produce only a few flowers at the top of long bare shoots. To produce compact, heavy, well-blooming plants, cut one-third of the stems to the ground line each year, always removing the oldest stems. This avoids the common practice of cutting the entire plant back to the ground every 3 or 4 years.

To produce an oleander tree, allow a single stem to grow. Prune it to form a small shade tree. In warm areas, the tree may reach a diameter of 6 to 8 inches and grow to a height of 20 to 25 feet.

Oleanders grow too large for planting close to a building, drive

or walkway. If they are desired as a shrub about the walls of a house, the plants should be cut to the ground line each year during the winter.

When plants are injured by cold in the colder areas of the State, cut them back to the ground line early in the spring before growth starts.

In pruning, always cut the stems to the ground line. Cutting the stems above the ground line results in ugly stumps that will spoil the appearance of your plants.

Burn all material that is cut off the plants and all old flowers that are removed. Oleanders are poisonous to both livestock and humans and can cause serious illness if eaten in sufficient quantity. Children have been killed by eating oleander. Livestock generally pass it by because of its unpleasant taste, but animals will nibble oleander if it is the only green plant available.

#### PROTECTION AGAINST COLD

Oleanders should not be attempted in areas of the State where winter temperatures may drop below 10 or 15 degrees F. In these colder parts of Texas, oleanders can be grown only as a pot or tub plant that is taken inside during the winter.

In areas where only occasional severe freezes occur, oleander plants should be covered during the winter. They may be wrapped with straw and burlap, or the plants may be cut to the ground in the fall and covered with a mound of earth about 4 inches deep. The mound of earth is removed in the spring after danger of frost is past; then the plants will grow a few feet high and bloom.

In warm areas, oleanders are so hardy that they are a work-saving plant for most gardeners.

#### DISEASE CONTROL

*Bacterial gall* is the only serious disease of oleanders. It usually is introduced and spread by scale insects. To control the disease, cut off and burn the infected parts and propagate only from healthy plants.

*Mildew* can be controlled easily with dusting sulphur.

#### INSECT CONTROL

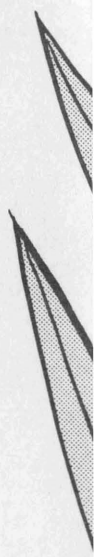
*Thrips*, which cause brown, dry spots on blooms, can be controlled with 5 percent DDT or 1 percent lindane dusts or sprays.

*Aphids* often attack the tender tips and may injure the bloom buds. Aphids can be controlled with lindane or malathion dusts or sprays.

*Scale insects* can be controlled by spraying every 10 days with malathion for three applications.

For more detailed information on insect control consult L-199, *Guide for Controlling Insects on Ornamental Plants in Texas*.





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