

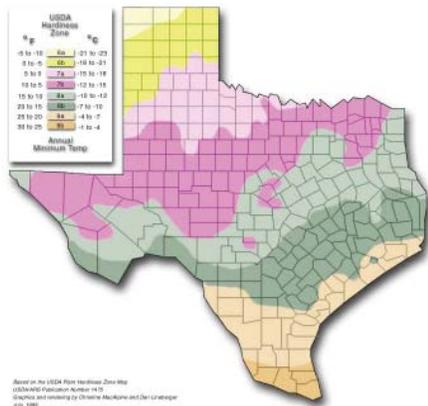
Tropical Hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) For Galveston County and the Texas Upper Gulf Coast:

Hibiscus is a genus of plants that includes over 200 species (e.g. scientific plant name = genus name + species name). The tropical hibiscus, *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, is best known for its showy flowers and glossy leaves. These plants, available in a wide range of flower colors, are largely synonymous with tropical environments throughout the world. Along the Texas Upper Gulf Coast, tropical hibiscus are a frequently used to add color and excitement to landscapes, patios and decks. Given the marginal hardiness of tropical hibiscus in this area, it is important to understand how best to select, install and maintain these plants to ensure long term landscape success.



Description:

Tropical hibiscus can reach heights of up to 15' but are more often in the 5' – 6' range. Plants can be used in a tree form or as a medium – large shrub. Tropical hibiscus can also be grown in containers. The glossy, green leaves are arranged alternately, and many cultivars have toothed margins. Flowers are the dominating characteristic and occur in a rainbow of colors, reaching up to 6" in diameter. Hibiscus have bell-shaped flowers with stamen spirally arranged along a distinct pistil. Blooms may have single or double rows of petals, with either smooth or scalloped edges.



Temperature:

Hardiness is the term used to describe a plants ability to tolerate cold temperatures. The USDA Hardiness Map divides the US into several Hardiness Zones based on a range of average low temperatures. Galveston County and the Texas Upper Gulf Coast are located in Zone 9, with a minimum temperature range of +20 °F to +30 °F. Caution: These are average lows and it should be noted that on occasion temperatures can dip below the +20 °F mark.

Hibiscus are hardy from zones 9 – 10 but cold damage can occur on some cultivars at temperatures above +20 °F. Frost damage is very common. Hibiscus frequently succumb to low temperatures in extremely cold years along the Gulf Coast. Damaged plants may require pruning to re-shape the canopy and to remove dead limbs/branches.

Soil:

Hibiscus prefer well drained soils and do best under slightly acidic conditions. In sandy soils use liberal amounts of thoroughly decomposed organic matter to adjust the aeration, drainage and water holding characteristics of the soil. In heavy clay soils consider the use of raised beds to avoid periods of excessive moisture.

Light:

Hibiscus require full sun but will tolerate partial shade. Plants grown too shady will become tall and leggy. Inadequate light will also limit flowering. Many established hibiscus compete for light in the landscape because they were not provided enough room at planting to reach their mature size. Carefully review the size specifications of select cultivars before planting and provide adequate space to accommodate plants as they grow and mature.

Fertilizer:

Hibiscus do not require regular fertilization but do benefit from the occasional application of a nitrogen (N) fertilizer. Generally speaking, no more than 1lb. of actual N per 1,000 square feet should be applied. The use of a no/low phosphorus (P) fertilizer is recommended to avoid potential accumulations of P in the soil. This practice can also help reduce potential contamination of surface and groundwater resources from landscape runoff. Select, handle, apply and store fertilizers safely and according to label instructions.

Irrigation:

Hibiscus are somewhat drought tolerant but will require supplemental irrigation during the hottest/driest months of the year. Water should be directed to the root system and the foliage should be kept as dry as possible. This practice will help limit foliar disease. Lawn irrigation systems are typically not well designed to water landscape beds and mature trees/shrubs.

Pests:

Hibiscus are susceptible to a variety of insect pests including aphids, scale, mealybugs, thrips and mites. In addition, hibiscus may also be infested by several foliar diseases. Powdery mildew, downy mildew and botrytis are among the most common. There are a number of cultural, mechanical, biological and chemical controls for these pests, however, many hibiscus will tolerate even heavy infestations and continue to thrive and grow.

Leaf disorders are very common on hibiscus. These may appear as yellow or mottled green leaves occurring in isolated areas or throughout the plant. Direct causes are numerous and difficult to identify. Most are related to some form of stress (i.e. water, pests, nutrition, salts, temperature, etc.). Older leaves frequently take on this appearance prior to dropping. Look for potential sources of stress before applying fertilizers or other chemical treatments.

Cultivars:

There are 100's of hibiscus cultivars available for landscape and ornamental use. Colors include: white, red, yellow, blue, gray, orange, purple, brown, pink, green, violet, multi-colored, singles, doubles, miniatures, and many more shapes and forms. Hibiscus can also be grafted to produce multiple varieties on the same plant.

Landscape Use:

Hibiscus make an excellent foundation planting, anchoring buildings and structures to the landscape. Planting in these areas also provides an added measure of cold protection. Hibiscus are among the most colorful plants in the landscape but select these colors carefully to avoid competing/clashing tones and hues. Many home gardeners use hibiscus in containers, adding color to patios and decks. These plants are then moved inside or to a protected area to over-winter. Landscapes throughout the Gulf Coast rely on the use of hibiscus to create a tropical feel and look. Plants are also well known for attracting hummingbirds – an added bonus for any landscape.

Additional Information:

The American Hibiscus Society has an excellent web site with good information

<http://www.americanhibiscus.org>

For more information on home landscape gardening we invite you to visit our web site at:

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>

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