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# Growing Oleander: The Complete Guide



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Botanical Name:  
*Nerium oleander*

Plant Type:  
Shrubs and Bushes

Season:  
Full Sun, Ex Part

FREE GUIDE!



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# Learn how to plant, grow, and care for oleander shrubs

By [Andy Wilcox](#)

**Last Updated:** December 6, 2024



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Oleanders are beautiful, large, flowering shrubs that are perfect for screening and privacy. Tough and drought-resistant, they typically grow in warmer regions; however, there are also winter-hardy varieties. Learn more about planting, growing, and caring for oleanders.

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## About Oleander

Oleander (*Nerium oleander*) is a beautiful ornamental shrub with attractive star-shaped flowers. It can have a shrubby, open-growth form or be trained into a small single or multi-trunked tree. It's also called Rose Bay or Rose Laurel.

These shrubs are drought tolerant, deer resistant, and do well in salt spray. They're a relatively rapid-growing flowering shrub, often putting on 2 feet per year, and are hardy in USDA zones 8 to 10. However, there are also more cold-hardy varieties (see below). An early spring cold snap can damage oleander, so protect it with 2 to 5 inches of mulch.

Oleanders bloom from late spring through late summer, and they have loads of five-petaled flowers in pink, white, red, magenta, and salmon. Their foliage is mostly dark green, frequently with a pale stripe down the center. The leaves are spear-shaped and usually 4 to 6 inches long but less than an inch in width.

## ADVERTISEMENT

While oleanders are pretty on their own as a specimen planting, they really shine as a privacy screen. Their evergreen nature, dense foliage, and growth after pruning make them perfect for closer plantings to form a hedge, natural privacy fence, or visual block. If they're hardy where you live, planting oleander can significantly add to your yard's privacy and serenity while providing a boost of color.



*Oleander (Nerium oleander) in full bloom.*

- [How to Grow Mountain Laurel \(Kalmia latifolia\)](#)
- [How to Grow Star Jasmine: The Complete Plant Guide](#)
- [How to Grow and Care for a Smokebush: A Complete Gardener's Guide](#)

## PLANTING

# When to Plant Oleander

Oleanders are only suitable for planting outdoors in frost-free areas. But planting in spring or fall is still the best practice. Plant anytime in spring when the weather and soil have warmed but before the heat of summer. In fall, plant once daytime highs have dropped, and you're thinking about needing a flannel shirt before going outside.

# Where to Plant Oleanders

Oleanders grow most rapidly in full sun but will also do well in partial sun. They are quite heat-tolerant and can grow in poor soil as long as drainage is good. While they prefer alkaline soil pH, they're a tough plant and will do well in most places.

Remember that the oleander you bought in a pot at the nursery is going to get larger. Their size makes them well-suited for screening or privacy but less so for small spaces and tight locations. Dwarf oleanders do well in large urns and pots which can be brought indoors to shelter over winter.

## How to Plant Oleanders

Oleanders are usually purchased from garden centers in one to three-gallon containers. They're easy to plant and easy to care for, and you'll be done in a few minutes.

## ADVERTISEMENT

- Remove all sod, mulch, and weeds from an area twice as large as the hole you will make.
- Dig a bowl-shaped hole a little deeper than the root ball and two to three times as wide. Loosen the soil on the sides and bottom of the hole—compacted soil makes it difficult for roots to penetrate and can cause poor drainage.
- Remove the oleander from its container. Prune any circling or girdling roots. Score the root ball to stimulate new growth if the shrub is rootbound.
- Test fit the oleander in the hole, checking the depth. The top of the root ball should rest at ground level. Enlarge the hole if necessary, or fill it in a bit for the proper fit.



- Backfill the hole using the native soil you removed, keeping the shrub vertical.
- When the hole is halfway refilled, tamp the soil lightly but firmly around the roots to remove air pockets—don't smash it. Give it a good drink of water, then keep filling the soil around the roots and firming it with your hands, watering again when complete.
- Apply mulch around the shrub, about 3-4 inches thick. Spread it evenly in a circle extending over the area you cleared and at least two feet from the base. Don't let the mulch touch the trunk. The final mulch job should look like a flat disk, not a volcano.

## GROWING

# How to Grow Oleanders

While oleanders are drought tolerant once established, they'll still need watering weekly for the first growing season.

They don't need fertilizer and can do well in poor soil conditions.

Prune oleanders to remove any winter injury, dead branches, or for size. They bloom on new wood, so pruning in late winter works perfectly.

## Taking Cuttings

When summer pruning oleanders to remove a wayward branch, you may wish to use some of the twigs as cuttings.

Oleanders grow well from cuttings, and it can be a great way to create enough stock to plant a longer privacy screen without spending a fortune.

- Cuttings from mature wood work best. Avoid soft, green, springy material.
- Take cuttings in midsummer for easiest rooting. Six-inch long pieces work well.
- Scrape the bark from the bottom inch of the cutting along two sides.
- Dip the cutting in any rooting hormone.

- Stick the cutting in a premoistened potting mix or root it in water. Place the cuttings in bright but indirect light.
- If in a potting mix, keep the media moist but not soggy.

When new growth has started to pop, gently tug on the cutting. If it resists, it has started to grow roots. If rooting in water, you'll see white roots start to pop out from the cutting. Pot them up once the roots are an inch long.

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## Types

- 'Austin Pretty Limits' is a dwarf variety

4-6 feet tall, making it a perfect oleander for growing in containers for those too far north to grow these plants outdoors.

- ‘Peach Blossom’ is a mid-sized shrub that grows to about 8-10 feet tall. Its classic pink blooms adorn the plant from spring into early autumn.
- ‘Hardy White’ is a white-blooming shrub. As the name suggests, this variety is a bit more cold-hardy than most and may survive in USDA zone 7, although with some tip burn. It is famous for its fragrant blooms.
- ‘Hardy Red’ is the hardiest cultivar, which may tolerate cold in USDA zone 7b. The plants grow to 8 feet tall with very deep red, single flowers.
- ‘Hardy Pink’ is another cold-weather cultivar that is hardy to zone 7b.
- ‘Calypso,’ a vigorous bloomer that has single cherry-red flowers and is very hardy (zones 8B through 11).

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

- [Aphids](#)
- Oleander caterpillars

## WIT AND WISDOM

- All parts of the oleander, including the seeds and even the smoke if it is burned, are toxic. Keep it away from curious pets or children.
- If growing in a tree form, you'll need to remove suckers that grow at the base of the plant.
- Plant oleanders a bit closer together,

fence or dense hedge.

SHRUBS AND TREES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

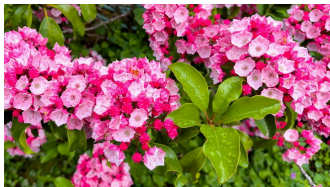
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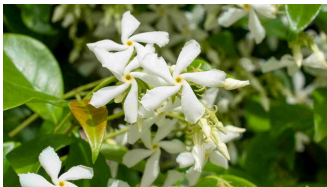
Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer and master gardener with a passion for soil health, small producers, forestry, and horticulture.

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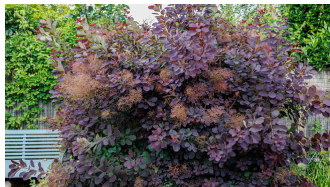
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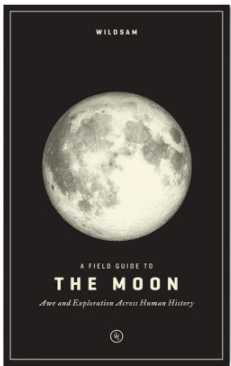




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