

Plumeria rubra var. *rubra*

[Synonyms : *Plumeria rubra*]

FRANGIPANI (English, German and Swedish) is a succulent evergreen shrub or tree (deciduous in temperate regions). Native to tropical America (Ecuador to Mexico) it has downy red-stalked fragrant, yellow-centred, dark rose flowers.

It is also known as *Frangipanier* (French), Jasmine tree, Nosegay frangipani, Red frangipani, Red jasmine of Jamaica, Red plumeria, Scented frangipani, True frangipani, and West Indian jasmine.

Warning – the milky sap is poisonous.

Rubra is derived from Latin *ruber* (red) with reference to the flowers.

The name Frangipani for some authorities is accounted for by a legend that alleges it to be the name of a 12th Century Italian nobleman of the influential Frangipani family (they were involved in the events leading to the election of the antipope Gregory VIII who died in 1187 within 2 months' of receiving this office). This nobleman is supposed to have formulated a desirable perfume (from various volatile oils) – one that was sought after by many of the ladies of the European nobility. The perfume is believed to have held sway for centuries and in the 16th Century is even alleged to have been a favourite of Catherine de Médicis (1519-1589). Then in due time when early European settlers established themselves on the other side of the Atlantic and discovered Frangipani its fragrance was so reminiscent of the 'classic' perfume that it was natural for them to christen it with the Italian's name. Other authorities suggest that early French settlers in the Americas compared the milky sap (it thickens rapidly on contact with air) to coagulating milk *frangipanier*.

The wood has been used for making musical instruments particularly drums and tom-toms. In their native lands the flowers (which retain their scent long after they have dried) are put between clothing and linen like lavender (*Lavandula*), and the women adorn themselves with them and use them to make garlands – and in Hawaii leis.