

EXOTIC & MEDITERRANEAN PLANTING GUIDE



EXOTIC & MEDITERRANEAN

Many Mediterranean plants are very easy to grow – they're low maintenance when established and much hardier than they look, thriving in the UK with the proper care. The vast majority are supplied as established potted plants, ready to plant out into your garden. If you cannot plant within a couple of days of receipt, you must keep them somewhere sheltered and frost-free, such as a conservatory, garage or greenhouse. This is especially important when buying early in the season when there may still be a chance of frosts.

Some plants that we import from Spain and other warmer countries may have a white film or powder on the leaves when you receive them. Don't worry – this is not evidence of disease or malnourishment. It is highly likely to be residue from fertiliser which is sprayed with water onto the plants. Because of the hot conditions in the nursery in these hotter countries (or sometimes in a greenhouse in the UK), the water evaporates very rapidly and this residue is sometimes left. This usually disappears quite quickly when washed off by our good old British weather!

Grow your plants in large pots as this will warm the roots – aiding growth. It will also enable you to move them to offer protection from frost or very low temperatures – they look great in pots! Use large pots that are 25cm or more in diameter. Use a few stones or crocks at bottom of the pot for weight and to aid drainage. Use good quality compost, firm down well with your heel, and water them in well. In a few years you may need to re-pot into larger pots.

Grow in the warmest, sunniest part of your garden – they are used to much better weather! Against a south-facing wall is ideal. If growing in the ground, make sure your soil is well drained as they generally don't like having "wet feet". When planting, add some grit/sand along with compost/ organic matter. Feed and water them well in summer – almost all growth will be during the summer months. Whilst these types of plants are very drought tolerant and can survive long periods without water, they will grow much better if well fed and watered in that period. Feed them with a general purpose fertiliser such as Fish, Blood & Bone.



WINTER PROTECTION

Protecting exotic plants over winter is important in cold winters. Move potted plants to a greenhouse, garage or conservatory until the frosts have passed. In most cases, over-wintering them somewhere with little light will not harm your plants – just make sure they don't dry out. If you are growing plants in the ground, cover with Fleece Covers and mulch over the ground to add extra protection. The more established a plant is, the more likely it is to survive harsher weather, so take extra care in the first few years.

A number of factors will affect hardiness – the age of the plant, moisture, or how recently it was planted. Many plants survive short exposure to a given "Hardy To" temperature – below this they will die. If exposed to prolonged low temperatures around or below 0°C, the plant will also deteriorate. Additionally, if the soil/compost is waterlogged, many plants will also struggle. This is often more important than the temperature. That said, these plants are all known to thrive in the UK if well looked-after and will become more tolerant over the coming years as they establish.

OLEANDER

In order to ensure that your Oleander plants have the best possible chance of flowering, you need to plant them in the hottest, sunniest part of your garden – they are from a much hotter/sunnier/drier climate than ours. Weather will play a factor – cool, wet summers are not conducive to good flowering, whereas in recent summers which have had a sustained period of hot, dry weather, the plants on our nursery have been smothered in flowers.

Feed and water them well in summer – all their growth will be between May and October. Whilst they are very drought tolerant indeed and can survive long periods without water, they will grow much more if well fed and watered in that period.

They also need to have the right nutrients in order to thrive. Feed them with a good quality general purpose fertiliser in spring – such as our Blooming Fast Superior Soluble Fertiliser for Flowers & Fruit – then when the buds appear in early summer, a high potash feed like tomato feed, to encourage flowering.

Oleander can take short exposure to -5°C when well-drained. However, in winter they do not really grow much so we advise moving them to shelter.

Oleander is reported to be toxic, as are many common garden plants if ingested, like daffodil bulbs, foxgloves, and poinsettia. The truth is that to come to serious harm, the amount of leaves needed to be eaten is a lot, and the amount of contact with sap extreme. There have been no reported incidents in the UK or Spain on nurseries, where people are in direct contact with Oleander plants on a daily basis. The advice we give is:

- Wear gloves when handling plants
- No need to trim or prune your Oleander
- Avoid places where young children/pets may come into contact with the plants



ITALIAN CYPRESSES (*Cupressus sempervirens*)



These are evergreen and very hardy so don't need protecting from frosts. Younger plants will need sheltering from the worst winds. They will not spread as much as other evergreen trees such as Leylandii – so much easier to control. For best results, remove fir-cones as they form – this will keep the plant in best, most upright shape.

Plant in pots or directly into the ground. Dig a hole the length of the rootball and twice the width, fill your hole back in and water in well.

Keep watering about twice a week for the next month, then once a week thereafter.



CITRUS TREES (ORANGES, LEMONS & LIMES)

Ours are “standard” style trees, supplied fully established in large pots and at least 3 years old. They are fine to be left in their pots if you cannot re-plant them straight away – just keep them warm and well watered. Grow them in large, well-drained pots, somewhere where there is little variance in temperature.

Water well and feed in summer with citrus feed, as they are sensitive to minor nutrient deficiencies – bit like humans taking vitamin pills. They can be temperamental when the temperature, light or humidity changes rapidly and can shed a few leaves or fruitlets quickly. Do not worry, this is quite normal – they are robust trees and will recover.

Citrus trees are some of the only ones that produce flowers and fruit at the same time. Fruit can take a full 12 months from setting to harvest, so be patient. It is natural for plants to set a lot of fruitlets, many of which drop off. The plant will select the strongest few to sustain to harvest.

The varieties we supply are hardier than you might imagine, but below -5°C these trees will die. In winter, move your trees to somewhere warmer – ideally somewhere with light, and above 10°C . If you can house them in your house (such as a conservatory), you will have the added benefit of glorious citrus fragrance filling the room when they are in flower, but take care with central heating, as this will dry them out considerably.

To plant, dig a hole the length of the rootball of the plant, and roughly double the width. Fill the hole back in with the same soil and press down with your heel. Water in well and continue to keep the soil moist thereafter.



CANARY ISLAND DATE PALMS

Date Palms are supplied between 2 and 4 years old. They thrive in the UK and are winter hardy to -6°C (see Hardiness notes above). Grow them in large pots – certainly for the first couple of years – so that you can move them somewhere that will offer protection from frost. Plant by digging a hole the length of the rootball and roughly double the width, then fill the hole back up & water in well.

New growth will form from the centre of the plant during summer. When outer leaves turn brown and unsightly, chop them off at the base of the leaf, please do not be alarmed if the outer leaves of your plants start to die off shortly after you receive your order. New ones will shoot from the centre. The pineapple-shaped “trunk” seen in photos of mature plants is formed over 10-20 years from the stumps of removed leaves. Feed with Fish Blood & Bone every 3 months, when the temperature is above 5°C .

