

### ***Hibiscus spp.***

Hibiscus, native to Asia, is a popular flowering shrub that is used widely throughout central and south Florida.

Hundreds of cultivars are available with different flowers, leaves and growth habits. Leaves may be large or small, rounded or pointed and light green to dark green in color. Flowers appear in a single or double form with many colors and color combinations available.

Some hibiscus varieties attain an overall height of 15 feet, but with regular pruning can be kept as low as 5 to 6 feet. Since hibiscus are tropical, they usually receive some damage when temperatures drop below 32°F. However, new growth emerges from undamaged older growth or roots with the return of warm weather.

Hibiscus should be used in full or half-day sun with a south or east exposure in Brevard County.

Plants are highly salt tolerant. In the landscape, they grow best when used as freestanding specimens in shrub or tree form, or when used as foundation plantings for large buildings. This is one of Florida's very best landscape plants for a colorful, tropical effect.

### **Other Species**

There are several hibiscus relatives that can be grown in Brevard and which are sometimes available including: Fringe Hibiscus or Japanese Lantern Hibiscus (*H. schizopetalus*); the temperate species Rose of Sharon (*H. syriacus*); and the native species Swamp Mallow (*H. coccineus*) and Rose Mallow (*H. moscheutos*); and finally, the tropical tree Seaside Mahoe (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*).

### **Planting**

Best growth can be expected when plants are set in well-drained, improved soil in full or half-day sun. Plants should be placed in the ground at soil level and mulch should be applied around the root area to keep soil moist. Water plants thoroughly every day for the first week. For the next two to

four weeks, water at the rate of two to three thorough waterings per week.

### **Fertilizing**

Hibiscus may be fertilized 2 to 4 times during the growing season. Use **Espoma Holly-Tone** or **Sunniland 6-6-6** in March, June and September. Apply 1/2 to 1 cup per plant and distribute lightly over the entire root zone.

### **Plant Problems**

**Aphids:** small insects that attack new growth and flower buds causing distorted leaves and bud drop.

**Solution:** use **insecticidal soap** or **Espoma Insect Control** and apply according to directions.

**Pink Hibiscus Mealybug Disease:** a virus that is brought to the plant by insects that infest the stems of the plant, especially the upper portion of the stems, causing severely distorted leaves and decreased flowering. Consult your Rockledge Gardens experts for the latest methods for controlling this serious pest.

