



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Rhoeo spathacea*¹

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Introduction

Oyster Plant is a short-stemmed tender foliage plant which makes attractive small, dense, spreading clumps (Fig. 1). It forms a solid groundcover of upright leaves. The six to eight-inch long, sword-shaped leaves are green above and purplish below. The unusual flowers, borne down among the leaves, appear as clusters of tiny white flowers nestled within two boat-shaped, purplish bracts. They are not noticeable unless you look closely.

General Information

Scientific name: *Rhoeo spathacea*

Pronunciation: REE-oh spath-AY-see-uh

Common name(s): Oyster Plant, Moses-in-the-Cradle

Family: *Commelinaceae*

Plant type: perennial; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: mass planting; container or above-ground planter; naturalizing; suitable for growing indoors; cut foliage/twigs; edging

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: 1 to 1.5 feet

Spread: depends upon supporting structure

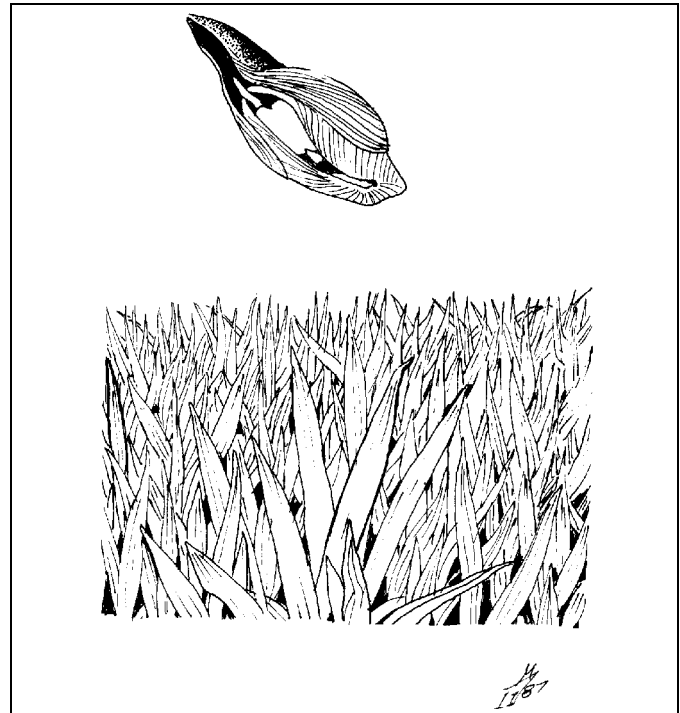


Figure 1. Oyster Plant.

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: linear
Leaf venation: parallel
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristic: flowers periodically throughout the year

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: unknown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not applicable
Current year stem/twig color: reddish
Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun; plant grows in the shade
Soil tolerances: alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam; occasionally wet
Drought tolerance: high
Soil salt tolerances: unknown
Plant spacing: 18 to 24 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: potentially invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Oyster Plant is ideal for use as a quick-growing groundcover, thriving in full sun to deep shade. Well-drained soils are a necessity since Oyster Plant is susceptible to a variety of leaf and especially root problems if over-watered. It is extremely drought-tolerant, even growing in cracks in a concrete wall.

The variety 'Variegata' has leaves striped red and yellowish-green. There is at least one compact cultivar available.

Propagation is by seeds, cuttings, or division of the clumps.

Caterpillars and mites can be a problem for Oyster Plant.

Pests and Diseases

Fungus, root rot, and leaf spot can all be problems for Oyster Plant, especially if plants receive irrigation.

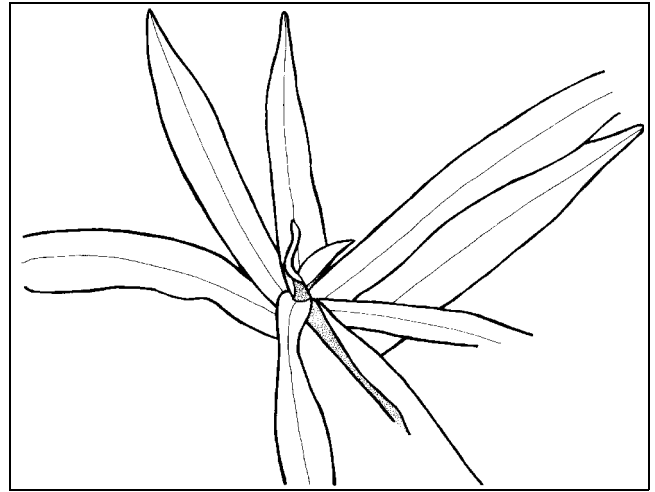


Figure 3. Foliage of Oyster Plant