Rhoeo spathacea

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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

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Figure 1. Oyster Plant.
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

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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.