FPS510

UF UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA
IFAS Extension

Rhoeo spathacea Oyster Plant, Moses In The Cradle[1]

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Introduction

Oyster plant is a short-stemmed, tender foliage plant that 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

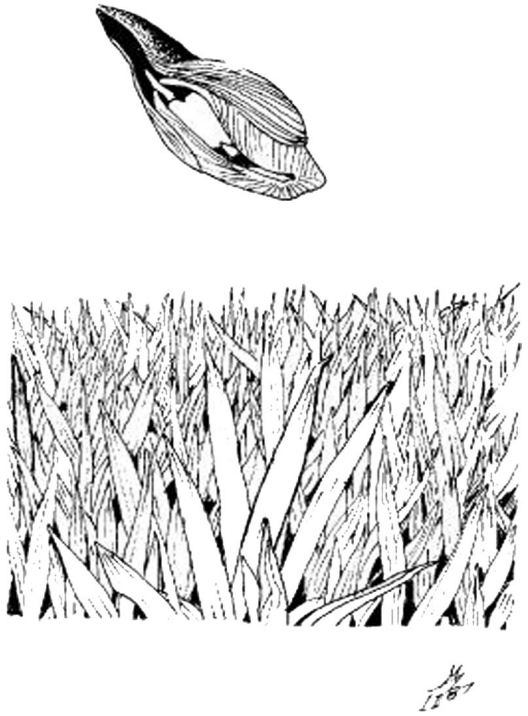

Figure 1. Oyster plant

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

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: 1 to 1.5 feet

Spread: depends upon supporting structure

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

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