



## *Nerium oleander* 'Sister Agnes' 'Sister Agnes' Oleander<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

Oleander is a wonderful easy-care, rounded shrub or small tree, with long, dark green leaves and an abundance of single or double, sometimes fragrant flowers (Fig. 1). 'Sister Agnes' has single pure white flowers. Often trained into an attractive small tree, multi-branched Oleander also does well as a quick-growing screen or large specimen planting. Planted on five to seven foot centers, a row of Oleander makes a nice screen for a large residence or other large-scale landscape.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Nerium oleander* 'Sister Agnes'

**Pronunciation:** NEER-ee-um oh-lee-ANN-der

**Common name(s):** 'Sister Agnes' Oleander

**Family:** *Apocynaceae*

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

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** container or above-ground planter; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; screen; trainable as a standard; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common



Figure 1. Middle-aged 'Sister Agnes' Oleander.

**Availability:** grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

### DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 10 to 18 feet

**Spread:** 10 to 15 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** round; vase shape

**Crown density:** moderate

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-417, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.
2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** medium

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite; whorled

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** lanceolate; linear

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** pleasant fragrance; very showy; year round flowering (Fig. 3)

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** 3 to 6 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure

**Breakage:** susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break

**Current year twig color:** green

**Current year twig thickness:** thick



Figure 3. Flower of 'Sister Agnes' Oleander.

### Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

**Soil salt tolerance:** good

### Other

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding

**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** not known to be susceptible

**Pest resistance:** very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect tree health or aesthetics

## USE AND MANAGEMENT

Growing well with only one yearly fertilization and springtime pruning, Oleander is one of the easiest shrubs to care for. Sometimes suckers produced at the base of the plant will siphon off too much energy and

flowering will be inhibited. These suckers should be pulled to remove them when they are young and succulent. The plant can be trained into a short central leader in the nursery and is often sold as a "standard" Oleander. It grows into a round-headed ball, flowering year-round in USDA hardiness zones 9b through 11. Flowering is reduced in winter in USDA hardiness zone 9a.

All parts of the plant are poisonous so care must be taken when locating Oleander near areas frequented by small children; burning of the trimmings will produce toxic fumes. Even chewing once or twice on a leaf or twig can send a person to the hospital.

Oleander survives drought extremely well and is well-suited to growing on soil too poor for most other plants, even tolerating salt spray, brackish water, and alkaline soil. Oleander needs full sun to perform its best, appearing too lanky and flowering little if planted in partial shade. The Oleander caterpillar can defoliate a plant within a week or two, and it is common in south and central Florida. It is commonly planted in highway medians as a no-maintenance plant. It grows in wet weather, slowing down in drought but never appears damaged by even severe drought.

Many other Oleander cultivars are available: 'Calypso' has single, cherry red flowers and is very hardy; 'Compte Barthelemy' has double red flowers; 'Mrs. Roeding', double pink flowers; 'Isle of Capri', single, light yellow flowers; 'Hawaii', single salmon-pink flowers with yellow throats; and dwarf cultivars 'Petite Pink' and 'Petite Salmon'. 'Variegata' and 'Variegatum Plenum' have variegated leaves.

Propagation is by cuttings.

### Pests

Pest problems are scale and Oleander caterpillar which can do quite a bit of damage to the foliage if left unchecked. Oleander caterpillar can defoliate a plant in a week or two.

### Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.