How to Grow and Care for Flamingo Willow

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Flamingo willow (*Salix integra* 'Flamingo') is a very fast-growing deciduous broad-leaf shrub. Flamingo offers nice stem and foliage color; the foliage is variegated with three colors during spring—white, green, and touches of pink—giving way to white and green in summer. The red branches offer good winter color, similar to those on red-twig dogwood. Flamingo willow is such a fast-growing plant that it requires constant pruning to keep its landscape appeal. It can be planted as a specimen plant, in small groups, or as a hedge border. It requires a moist location and is ideal for rain gardens and other damp soils.

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| **Common Name** | Flamingo willow, Japanese flamingo willow, flamingo dappled willow |
| **Botanical Name** | *Salix integra* 'Flamingo' |
| **Family Name** | *Salicaceae* |
| **Plant Type** | Shrub  |
| **Mature Size** | 4 to 6 ft. tall, with a spread of 5 to 7 ft. |
| **Sun Exposure** | Full, partial |
| **Soil Type** | Moist but well-drained |
| [**Soil pH**](https://www.thespruce.com/what-to-know-about-soil-ph-5204392) | Neutral to alkaline (5.6 to 7.8) |
| **Bloom Time** | Spring  |
| **Flower Color** | Yellow |
| **Hardiness Zones** | 5, 6, 7 |
| **Native Area** | Asia |

Flamingo Willow Care

Flamingo willow is best planted in soil that is moist but well-drained, in a full sun location. The plant will form an attractive arching habit if left unpruned, but pruning is necessary to take full advantage of the tri-colored leaves and red stems. It may require several prunings over the year.

Light

Full sun will produce the best foliage color, but the shrub will tolerate some shade and may prefer shade in very hot climates.

Soil

This plant likes moist but well-drained soil that has ample organic material.

Water

The question of how often to water a flamingo willow doesn't really apply. The tree can only grow in a wetland or marsh area, where it will get all the water it needs. In dry soils, apply a thick layer of mulch to help retain soil moisture.

Temperature and Humidity

Best foliage color will be achieved in cooler climates north of zone 7. This plant tolerates a wide range of humidity levels.

Fertilizer

Willows don't need any additional fertilizer.

Types of Flamingo Willow

Flamingo willow bears a close resemblance to several other willow species used in landscape applications. Remember, though, that these are plants that should not be used around [septic systems, underground pipes](https://www.thespruce.com/safe-plants-to-grow-over-septic-tanks-and-drainfields-2132661), etc. The best-known related species include:

* [**Weeping willow**](https://www.thespruce.com/weeping-willow-trees-salix-babylonica-3269357) (*Salix babylonica*), is a fast-growing, medium-to-large tree often planted around bodies of water.
* [**Pussy willow**(*Salix discolor*)](https://www.thespruce.com/planting-pussy-willow-trees-for-spring-2130899), is a classic willow shrub that is considerably larger than flamingo willow. It is often grown for its decorative catkins.
* **Rosegold pussy willow***(Salix gracilistyla)*is similar to *S. discolor*but has catkins that turn pinkish, then orange, then yellowish.
* [**Goat willow**](https://www.thespruce.com/goat-willow-plant-profile-5070518) (*Salix caprea)*is an old-world version of North America's pussy willow. It is a large shrub or small tree, depending on how it is tended.
* **White willow** (Salix alba) is quite a large tree, growing to 50 to 80 feet.
* **Coral bark willow** (*Salix* *alba* subsp. *vitellina* 'Britzensis') is a cultivar of white willow with stems that are orange-red in late winter. Uncontrolled, it can grow to 80 feet, but it can be controlled with frequent pruning.

Pruning

To achieve the best color, maintain the following pruning regimen:

* Prune heavily in early spring, when still dormant. This will create the best leaf color.
* Prune again in late spring to early summer.
* Prune again in August.

Cut 1/3 of the older branches right down to the ground in spring, and trim back the top growth (1 foot or so) on the remaining branches. The goal is to stimulate new growth, which will let you enjoy the red stems in winter and good variegated leaf color in the spring.

Propagating Flamingo Willow

Like all willows, flamingo willow is very easy to propagate:

1. In spring, cut 8-inch lengths of softwood stems with no leaves.
2. Fill a small garden pot with good-quality potting soil and place the cuttings in it.
3. When the root system is visible through the drainage hole in the bottom of the pot, the willow is ready for transplanting.

How to Grow Flamingo Willow From Seed

Since flamingo willow is so easy to grow from cuttings and quite difficult to grow from seed, most gardeners simply find cuttings from fellow gardeners or reach out to their local nursery or horticultural society.

Common Pests and Plant Diseases

A variety of diseases can affect willows, including blights, crown gall, powdery mildew, leaf spots, scab, rust, and cankers. Treatment of these diseases can include removing the affected areas or using a fungicide, where appropriate. Insect pests include aphids, scale, borers, lace bugs, beetles, and caterpillars. Though some of these can be handled with chemical or organic treatments, others—such as caterpillars—are best removed by hand.

FAQ

* **What are alternatives to flamingo willow?**

*The Salix integra* species includes one other popular cultivar in addition to the flamingo. Dappled willow (*Salix integra* ''Hakuro-nishiki') is a very similar plant to the flamingo. The flamingo willow is a *sport* of the dappled willow, achieved by propagating a genetic mutation of the dappled willow. The growth habit of the dappled willow is identical to the flamingo, but it lacks the tri-colored foliage.

* **Can flamingo willow be grown indoors?**

Though flamingo willow can be started in containers, keeping it healthy and growing requires planting it in the outdoor soil, where it will grow to its full height and width.

* **How long can flamingo willow live?**

With the proper care, a flamingo willow tree might live for up to 30 years.