Rhoeo spathacea Oyster Plant, Moses in the Cradle

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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
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
Plant habit: upright
Plant density: dense

Figure 1. Oyster plant

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
**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  

![Figure 3. Foliage of oyster plant](image)

**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 ground-cover, 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.

**Pests and Diseases**  
Caterpillars and mites can be a problem for oyster plant.

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