



Caladiums Brighten Shady Areas In The Landscape

Unlike spring flowering bulbs which bloom for a few weeks caladiums provide continuous color all summer. Unfortunately, many home gardeners buy caladiums tubers (bulbs) only in the spring.

Tubers and full size plants in containers are available at most local nurseries and garden supply dealers all summer.

There are two types of caladiums available-- fancy leaved and lance or strap leaved. Fancy leaved caladiums are the more popular type. Large colorful somewhat heartshaped leaves are characteristic of this type. The distinguishing characteristic of the lance leaved type is a narrow elongated leaf. The length of the leaves is similar to the fancy leaved type but the plants are usually more compact. Lance leaved caladiums are hardier and lend themselves for use in flower arrangements because of their lasting quality as cut foliage.



Caladium tubers



Caladiums grow best on high organic, well aerated soil. To obtain these soil conditions it is generally necessary to amend sandy soils with organic matter. Sources of organic matter include peat moss, well rotted manure, and compost.

Caladiums can be grown in unamended poor soil for at least one season since there is enough food

stored in the tuber to last one season. Tubers grown in unamended poor soil should be discarded and replaced annually.

Tubers should be planted 2 inches deep and 18 inches apart with growing points facing upward. Firm the soil around them when planting to prevent the formation of air pockets between the tuber and the soil.

Proper fertilization produces healthy large leaved plants. When grown in organic soils, spread 1 tablespoon of a complete fertilizer (6-6-6 or 8-8-8) around each plant or 2 lbs. per 100 square feet of bed area 4 to 6 weeks after planting and every two months during the growing season. Plants grown in sandy soils will benefit from monthly applications during the growing season since fertilizer is rapidly leached from soil.

Caladiums cannot tolerate cold temperatures and when soil temperatures drop below 60 degrees F plants will gradually deteriorate and finally the foliage will die. This is essentially what happens in the fall in north Florida. The yellowing and drooping of the foliage signals the time to dig and store caladium tubers. They should be dug before the leaves completely deteriorate since leafless tubers will be difficult to locate.

It is not necessary to dig and store caladiums in south Florida since they usually continue growing most of the year. In central Florida, there is enough cold temperature during the winter to cause death of the foliage. However, tubers do not have to be dug since soil temperatures usually do not drop low enough to injure them.

Tubers should be lifted from the soil, cleaned of soil particles, and dried. Pack the dried tubers in dry peat moss or sand and store in a dry well-ventilated area at a minimum temperature of 70 degrees F. Do not allow temperatures to exceed 90 degrees F or fall below 60 degrees F for prolonged periods of time.



Tubers gradually lose moisture and shrink at temperatures above 90 degrees F. Storage

temperatures below 60 degrees F result in physiological breakdown of the tubers. Storing tubers in unheated garages where temperature during the winter months can drop to 40 degrees F or below will result in cold damaged tubers.



Caladiums grown in the field.

There is a wide choice of colors in selecting caladiums for the yard. The popular Candidium and White Christmas varieties are white with strongly contrasting green veins. These varieties brighten shaded areas and are particularly handsome when interspersed with white geraniums white petunias variegated vinca or hydrangea.

Popular pink or rose colored leaves appear on such varieties as Lord Derby, Pink Cloud, Kathleen, Rose bud, Carolyn Wharton and others. Crimson Wave has a showy crimson crinkled center. Red is found in the Blaze John Peed Red Flair and Freda Hemple varieties. Dark green veins and borders give added accent to the red leaves. Spangled Banner has red glowing leaves with pink spots.

Caladiums are also easy to grow in a pot or tub for a shaded spot on the patio or in an entrance area. When in pots, the thirsty plant will call for extra watering due to the drying of the pot during the summer.

Whether in a container, in masses, or as border material, this popular summer annual will provide color accent to the home garden all summer long for very little cost and upkeep.

Provided by University of Florida Extension
