



Care of the Kalanchoe Plant

Kalanchoe **blossfeldiana** -is one of the prettiest and famous representatives of the succulents family. Although it is easily cultivated all over the world, it originates from Madagascar while some creeping varieties were found the rain forests of Brazil and Southeast Asia. The name kalanchoe came from a Chinese word but it is still unknown how and when it was given to the plant.

The original colors of the kalachoe were orange and red. It grew rather tall and was not too much adapted as a potted plant for the consumer. The big breakthrough was about 1980 when Danish and Dutch growers managed to create the current plant, a variety with compact shape, rich foliage, sturdy stems and plenty of flowers. Plant breeders developed a variety of colors: yellow, orange, pink, purple, white and just recently bi-colored varieties.



The plant is very popular with consumers because of its long lasting flowers and attractive foliage It normally blooms during the short days of winters and has become a popular plant from late fall to late winter.

Kalanchoe's leaves are fleshy, wide, oval-shaped, with indented edges, appear in turn throughout the stems, are very tender and break easily.

Care

Kalanchoes are easy to grow, need warm temperatures and minimum care. In our moderate climate it can be as easily grown indoors and outdoors but only in pots and not in the ground. Temperatures between 60 F and 85F are ideal for development and blooming of the plant. Kalanchoe is very sensitive to cold and it takes only a few hours of near 40 F for the plant to die. Avoid placing it near drafts or cool windowsills.

Their root system is extremely sensitive and it would be advisable to use clay pots that allow better aeration of the roots. Ensure excellent drainage by placing pebbles at the bottom of the pot and use light soil containing lots of peat moss, perlite and sand. Always empty excess water from the tray and never let your pot stand in water.

Kalanchoe plants love to be alone in small pots. However, the larger the pot the larger the leaves but the size of the top will hardly affect blooming or rate of growth. Avoid planting companion plants in the same pot with kalanchoes and repot each spring adding fresh soil. Kalanchoes grow rather slowly, its average height is 15-45cm while in older plants the stems become woody.

This plant loves and needs plenty of light to grow, if light is adequate its leaves will develop a beautiful reddish outline. During summer do not allow direct sunlight because its leaves who contain lots of water will get sun-burned. Direct sunlight from fall till early spring will not harm your plant.

Provide plenty of water when the soil seems dry to the touch but do not overwater because the roots will rot. If you have the time, let the water sit for a while before watering so that it will get the temperature of the environment. Kalanchoes can stand dry conditions but do not let them dry out completely because it will greatly compromise its growth. The plant will need some time to get back into shape and avoid wetting the leaves when watering.

Kalanchoes are usually bought or given as a gift with flowers. So, when the flowers start to die back, cut them off and let the plant rest. After deadheading, you should reduce watering as the plant will need less water during this resting period. Soon you will notice new buds and your plant will bloom again. This change in blooming and resting cycles will go on throughout the year irrelevant to seasons.

You should however keep in mind that blooming of the plant is related to how much light the plant is allowed to have. Several hours in darkness will enhance flower production. In other words, if you keep the light (even artificial light) to 8-10 hours per day or less, you will help the plant produce new buds. Following bud formation you can bring the plant back to regular lighting.

Anyway, plenty of light will enhance overall growth but will reduce blooming. Kalanchoes tend to bloom more from fall till early spring the reason being that days are shorter during these months.

Kalanchoe in flower need only very little fertilizer. Generally the plants should have a good supply when you buy them in the store, so you should not need to worry for the first few months. If you want to keep your Kalanchoe past the first flower, start fertilizing only when you see new growth on the plant. Use standard pot plant fertilizer (like 20-8-20) once every second week at 1/4 to 1/2 of the recommended rate

Kalanchoes are resistant to disease and insects but if kept outdoors, could eventually be affected by aphids, scale, spider mites and nematodes. Common symptoms include apart from insects themselves on the crossing of the stems or the undersides of leaves, the presence of honeydew on leaves, creased faded leaves and webs, or leaves that look torn or bitten. Prefer non-toxic treatments because kalanchoes are very sensitive to certain ingredients used largely in insecticides widely used. If you decide to buy a chemical insecticide do tell the nursery that you are planning to use it on a kalanchoe plant.

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