CALADIUMS

Caladiums add color to landscapes in the summer. Large drifts of color provide a bold statement anywhere in the landscape but caladiums show the best color in partially shaded areas. Consider adding some in pots to decorate your front entry, pool deck or patio.

The leaves of caladiums come in two forms. Fancy leaf types have heart shape leaves and are old garden favorites. Lance or strap leaf types are becoming more popular since they are hardier in the sun and hold up well in flower arrangements. Colors range from dark red, red, pink, white and pale green. Leaves of some varieties have a mixture of colors or may be freckled or splotched. On some varieties, the veins are a vivid color on a contrasting background color.

Caladiums are native to tropical America and thrive in warm humid weather. We are fortunate that they grow nearly year-round in our area. The leaves die back briefly during the winter months and resprout from tuberous storage roots each spring. This is one bulb which grows well here year after year.

Garden centers are selling caladiums in pots now and often have dried tubers, the thick swollen root, for sale. The larger the tuber, the larger the plant will grow since there is more stored food to help it along. Mammoth and Jumbo are the largest grades in diameters of 2½ inches or larger. Number 1 tubers run 1½” to 2½” and the smaller Number 2 size is from 1” to 1½” in diameter. Watch for the size grade when you shop. Smaller tubers on sale can still be a deal, but realize it may take more to create a mass effect in a pot or in the landscape.

Caladiums grow best in moist soil which drains well. Sandy soils should have compost or peat moss added to help hold moisture and improve growing conditions. If caladiums get too dry, they wilt and the leaves may die. Plants in improved moist soils live for years, while plants in dry soils may not thrive and may actually seem smaller from year to year.

When planting caladiums outside, avoid areas under the eaves since the pouring rain damages the tender leaves. Planting in masses has a more vivid effect than planting in random locations. Grouping caladiums also makes it easier to water these plants which prefer more moisture than some of our tougher landscape choices.

For outdoor planting in the landscape, space tubers 18” apart. Bury the tubers 2” deep with the point up. To encourage more sprouts, scoop out the central bud at the point.

Fertilization helps keep plants lush. Use 2 pounds of 6-6-6 or 8-8-8 per 100 square feet of planting area, or 1 tablespoon per plant, about a month after planting. Repeat applications will be needed every 2 months until fall when the plants begin to decline. Plants in sandy soil will need monthly applications to keep them looking good since fertilizer is readily washed out of sandy soil during the rainy season.

The University of Florida recommends a few caladiums for indoor conditions. For white leaves, choose ‘White Christmas’ which has green veins. ‘Seagull’ is green with white veins and ‘Aaron’ is creamy white with a green border. Red leaf selections include ‘Scarlet Beauty’ and ‘Poecile Anglais’ which are low growing, ‘Red Flash’ which has pink freckles and green leaf edge and the very dark red ‘Fire Chief’. ‘Carolyn Whorton’ is a popular multicolor pink selection. ‘Lord Derby’ has rose colored leaves with a green border.

Plan now for our hot summer months. Caladiums can add refreshing color during the hottest time of the year.
Some faithful readers brought to my attention an error from a previous article. The printed article explained that ¾–1” of water is required to wet the area thoroughly. It incorrectly stated that this equated to nearly a quarter million gallons of water for each 1000 square feet of lawn. NOT! Proper watering will not flood your landscape. It should have stated that watering to a depth of ¾–1” of water is equivalent to 465 to 620 gallons of water for each 1000 square feet of lawn. This information should be helpful in determining realistic expectations for your monthly water bill.

Anyone interested in horticulture for therapy should attend the upcoming Horticulture Therapy Association meeting at Leu Gardens in Orlando on May 6. Contact Ann Zito for registration information at 407-246-2620.

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