



Exotic Caladium Queen of Leaves

Common names:
Angels' Wings,
Elephant Ears,
Heart of Jesus.



Landscaping Service

For All Season Gardening

Caladiums

Caladiums are a lot like snowflakes -- no two are exactly the same! Each plant develops its own spectacular foliage with colorful patterns that vary from leaf to leaf. Each leaf seems to be hand painted with striking combinations of green, white, pink, and red. Caladium leaves can be shaped like hearts, arrows, or lances in color combinations of red, pink, rose, white, chartreuse, and shades of green, with prominently colored midribs and contrasting margins.

Some people know Caladiums only as a houseplant. Caladium are perfectly comfortable in a pot or container, inside the house, or outside on a deck or patio. They are low maintenance plants and provide a colorful addition to any living room or entertainment area. Others recognize Caladiums as a colorful, leafy plant that brightens up the shady areas of their yard.

Growing Caladium plants in the garden is easy. They are tropical plants, native to the Amazon river area of Brazil. So, it's no surprise that these plants love a warm, shady, humid environment. It grows to its full height of 12" to 30" in one season. The leaves of these tropical plants can range from 6 inches to 2 feet long.

Caladiums are ideal border plants, lovely in window boxes and stunning when planted in a random mix in beds. Caladiums thrive in partial sun and shade; some varieties are more sun tolerant and can be planted in full sun or low shade conditions, as long as they receive adequate moisture to maintain their proper humidity level.

Warning: This plant is toxic if eaten in large quantities. All parts of the caladium plants (Flowers, Leaves, Sap/Juice) are poisonous to dogs and cats, as well as children. Ingestion can cause severe irritation to the mouth and throat and may also be an irritant to the G.I. tract.



While people talk about Caladium "bulbs", they are really grown from a tuberous root. Each caladium tuber has a large central bud surrounded by several small buds. Most caladium tubers only produce a few colorful leaves when the prominent central bud is allowed to grow. Remove the central bud to allow the tuber to produce many more shoots and leaves. Use the tip of a sharp knife to lift out the large central bud, being careful not to injure any of the surrounding small buds.

Planting Tip: To promote more leaves, remove the largest bud in the center of the root.

The largest tubers will produce the largest plants. Many people prefer to start with new roots each year. Most home gardeners find the tubers produced by their own plants are smaller, and rely on commercial growers to produce the biggest tubers for the best plants.

There are two basic types of caladium cultivars: **Fancy-leaved** and **Strap-leaved (Lance-leaved)**.



1. The **fancy-leaved** have large, broad, heart-shaped leaves on long petioles with a defined depression (ear) where the petiole joins the leaf. They range in height from 12 to 30 inches.

2. The **strap- or lance-leaved** types have smaller, narrower, thicker, elongated leaves on short petioles giving the plants a more compact habit. Strap-leaved caladiums generally produce more leaves per tuber than the fancy-leaved caladiums. Most strap-leaved types grow less than a foot in height.

Caladium leaves do not have stems, but instead they originate on a long petiole emerging directly from the tuber. The petiole is the stalk that supports a leaf in a plant and attaches it to the stem (or tuber). Many people often call it a stem, which is incorrect.

The only finicky thing about caladiums is that they **HATE** being planted in cool soil.

Temperature

Being native to the tropics, Caladium does not like cold weather. These plants should only be placed outside when night temperatures are reliably in the 50s. If planted too early in the spring, cool soil temperatures will cause tubers to rot before they sprout.

Some gardeners prefer to start tubers indoors in moist peat moss or potting soil in containers. Barely cover the tubers with soil and place the container in a



warm room with bright light. Tubers should be started indoors approximately four weeks before planting outdoors. Wait to transplant them outdoors until all danger of frost has past, and the soil has warmed.



Caladiums require a warm, moist soil. A minimum soil temperature of 70°F is preferred during the summer. Summer soil temperatures over 85°F can result in leaves with more green color and less of the other highly-prized, brilliant colors. High levels of nitrogen fertilization, or 'Over-watering' them can cause this same problem.

Location

Caladiums grow best in partial shade (two hours to four hours of direct sun), or in the early morning sun. In those conditions they produce lush growth with large, colorful leaves. Caladiums will also perform reasonably well in full shade, but their color may not be as brilliant.



Caladiums traditionally need protection from the hot, dry, afternoon sun. Caladiums grown in more sun than they prefer will generally produce smaller leaves, and may develop a brownish, scorched appearance. Pink varieties are usually more sensitive to heat than other varieties.

However, some of the newer cultivars tolerate exposure to full sun (six hours or more of direct sun), but still avoid the hot, dry, sunny locations. Your plants will need to stay strong and healthy to hold up against the extra sun, so feed and water them regularly. The secret to raising sun-tolerant caladium varieties is to provide enough water to keep the soil consistently, 'slightly-moist' - not 'constantly-wet'!

Soil

Caladiums like rich soil. If the soil is poor, add generous amounts of compost and manure. A 2-inch to 3-inch layer of mulch or compost can be incorporated into the soil to improve soil aeration, drainage, and organic matter content. The soil needs to be kept moist, but should be well draining. Root and foliage growth will be limited unless the soil is well aerated.



Spread a complete fertilizer, such as 8-8-8, at a rate of 1 to 2 lb per 100 square feet of bed area (2 Tbsp per square foot). For best

growth, caladiums prefer soils with a pH between 6.0 and 6.5 (slightly acid).

Caladium plants should be planted with the top of the root ball level with the soil of the bed.

Plant unsprouted tubers about 2 inches below the soil surface. When planting tubers, you should see growing points or even pinkish-white sprouts on the knobby side of the tuber. Both roots and shoots emerge from the top of the tuber; place the knobby side up. The smoother, rounded side is the bottom of the tuber. Space 8 inches apart for small tubers and 12 inches apart for large tubers.

Once they are planted, mulch the bed with 2 inches of your favorite mulch and water in.

Fertilizer

Caladiums are heavy feeders of potash and phosphorus and must have ample moisture and summer feeding of fertilizer in order to produce good tubers for the next growing season.

Apply 1 Tbsp of 5-10-10 fertilizer per square foot every 4 to 6 weeks during the growing season. Another fertilizer option is to use a 6 month time-release fertilizer, such as Osmocote® Outdoor & Indoor (15-9-12 plus micronutrients)

Excessive fertilization can cause the leaves to become greener, losing the reds and whites that make them so appealing.

Fertilize caladiums growing in containers every two weeks with a soluble liquid fertilizer to promote strong foliage growth, such as Miracle-Gro® Liquid All Purpose (8-7-6).

Water thoroughly after fertilization to prevent fertilizer burn. Caladium leaves can burn if fertilizer is applied directly to them. They may also burn if the plants are in direct sunlight or under-watered.

Water

Keep beds of caladiums well watered during the summer, especially those receiving lots of sun. Caladiums are not drought tolerant and should be watered on a regular basis. Water frequently and thoroughly, keeping the soil evenly moist to touch but not saturated. If planted in a container, be sure it is well-drained and has a drainage hole, as caladiums rot when kept too wet.

Water on the leaves in midday sun can cause burn, so be sure to water very early so the foliage dries before exposed to direct midday sun.

Blossoms

Sometimes caladium plants will produce a blossom which is similar to a calla lily. Most home gardeners prefer to remove the bloom since it takes away energy from the foliage and reduces the tuber size.

Potential Problems

No serious insect problems. Slugs and snails may damage foliage. Fragile leaves can be damaged by wind or hail.

Tuber rot -- Tubers may decay in storage or during the growing season. Several bacteria or fungal organisms cause tuber rot. Bacteria cause a soft, slimy decay, while fungi cause a dry, chalky rot. To reduce the potential of tuber rot, select disease-free tubers for planting and store tubers properly to avoid high humidity and cool temperatures. Never store caladium tubers in the refrigerator.

Leaf spot -- An anthracnose fungus can cause the lower leaves to develop light tan to brown spots. Generally, the disease is not



severe enough to warrant chemical control. Remove and destroy diseased leaves as they appear.

Leaf burn -- Burning of older leaf margins and scorching of leaves usually are the result of foliar application of fertilizer, excess sun light, or a lack of water. Cultivars with thin, translucent leaves are especially prone to scorch when under drought stress or when phosphorus or potassium are deficient. The older foliage is especially prone to drought damage.

Fall Care and Storage

Caladiums can be treated as annuals and left in the garden to be killed by cold weather.

However, it is possible to save caladium tubers for planting again the following year. In the fall with the onset of cool nights, the leaves will begin to fade and droop. Before the leaves have lost all color and before soil temperatures drop below 55°F, dig the tubers that are to be saved, retaining the foliage, and sort them by color or cultivar.

Spread them out in an area protected from moisture and cold temperatures. Allow them to air dry for a week. Do not place in full sun. After leaves have dried, cut them from the tubers. Store the tubers in mesh bags or pack lightly in boxes with peat moss, sphagnum moss, perlite or vermiculite.

Store them where the temperature will not fall below 60°F.

Your caladiums will rest for a few months before beginning their next growing cycle. However, unless the tubers are large, the second year's foliage is usually not as large as the first year.

Planters, Pots, Urns and Window boxes

Fill your containers with good quality, well-drained soil. Fertilo™ Ultimate potting medium will work fine. Make sure there are adequate drainage holes in each of your containers. Caladium tubers must never sit in waterlogged soil or they will rot. Keep in mind the mature size of the varieties you have chosen and plan your container sizes accordingly.

Plant the tubers 2" deep. Look for the sides of the tubers that appears to have the most "eyes" or growing points; these look much like the eyes on a potato. Plant the tubers with the eyes facing up.

Feel free to mix caladiums with other plants in the same container. Just keep in mind that all must have the same light and water needs.

Gardeners crave color in shady areas of their landscapes just as much as they do in sunny areas. Unfortunately, shade-loving plants generally are not so flamboyant, and the selection of colorful bedding plants for shady gardens is limited.

The colorful, tropical foliage of caladiums combines beautifully with impatiens, begonias, torenias, liriop, ferns, hostas, gingers and other shade-loving plants. Enjoy the colorful foliage and feel free to cut a few leaves to add color to your mixed flower arrangements. Caladiums, as cut flowers, will keep for 2-3 weeks and make a gorgeous display in a vase or floral arrangement.

More Resources:

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8517.html>

<http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/landscape/flowers/hgic1160.html>

<http://www.hfr.ksu.edu/doc3181.ashx>

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/caladium/>

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/caladiums.html>

