

Caladiums

The bright leaves of these easy plants are why so many gardeners choose them for quick color

Caladium leaves can be shaped like hearts, arrows, or lances in color combinations of red, pink, rose, white, chartreuse, and green.

The brilliant foliage of this classic plant is often translucent, which makes them light up your garden. They've brightened shady spots for generations, but now you have the option of newer selections that can take some direct sun.

Nurseryman Stewart Myers of Myers Plants & Pottery in Pelham, Alabama, (myersplantsandpottery.com) has been planting thousands of caladium tubers every year for the last 30 years. His secret? Always plant after Mother's Day, when the soil has warmed. "If you plant too early, when the soil is still cool, your bulbs will rot," he says. Caladiums are ideal for both new and experienced gardeners because they are so easy to grow. ➔

'Rose Glow,' a newer caladium with beautiful pink-white-and-green leaves, is great for shady spots.

— TAKE IT FROM A PRO —

Look for These Leaves

“For a big show of color, pick your favorite selection and plant a bunch,” Stewart says. “Larger, fancy-leaf types (heart-shaped leaves) work best for this. Try strap-leaf types (shorter plants with bunches of leaves) or dwarf types (smaller, heart-shaped leaves) for pots and window boxes.” Caladiums are great companions for impatiens, begonias, and ferns.



◀ **‘Red Flash’**
Fancy-leaf; grow in sun to shade

KEEP YOUR CALADIUMS HAPPY

Caladiums originated in South America, so they thrive in warm weather. Like their larger cousins, elephant’s ears, they’re care-free once you cover their basic needs.

LIGHT: All caladiums love filtered sunlight and shade. Some newer selections can take more sun.

SOIL: Caladiums need well-drained soil that’s rich in organic matter, such as mushroom compost or chopped leaves.

PLANT: Buy potted caladiums ready to plant, or grow them from tubers. (Though they’re sometimes called bulbs, they are really tubers.) Plant tubers point side up about 1 to 1½ inches deep. Space them 8 to 14 inches apart, depending on the ultimate size of your plants as listed on the tag.

WATERING: Always water caladiums regularly. Keep the soil slightly moist. Add mulch, such as pine straw, to help retain soil moisture and conserve water. If you have caladiums in full sun, don’t let them dry out.

FEEDING: Use a slow-release fertilizer such as Osmocote Outdoor & Indoor Smart-Release Plant Food 19-6-12 or a liquid feed such as Miracle-Gro Liquid All Purpose Plant Food 12-4-8.

WINTERING: In the Tropical South, you can leave tubers in the ground year-round. (See plant zone map on page 60.) In the rest of the South, you’ll need to dig them up in early fall if you want to replant next year. Remove any remaining leaves and roots. Let tubers dry in a shaded area for a few days. Place them in dry peat moss to store. Keep them in a warm spot (50 to 60 degrees) until it’s time to replant.



▶ **‘Iceberg’**
Strap-leaf; grow in sun to shade; new selection



▶ **‘Pink Symphony’** Strap-leaf; grow in sun to shade; ideal in a pot



▶ **‘Postman Joyner’** Fancy-leaf; grow in shade only; a classic **SL**



▶ **‘Miss Muffet’** Dwarf; grow in sun to shade; the best mixer



▶ **‘Carolyn Whorton’**
Fancy-leaf; grow in sun to shade; great en masse



▶ **‘Candyland’** Strap-leaf; grow in sun to shade; has sweet spots

BUY CALADIUMS: You’ll find a good selection of caladiums at your local nursery. For an even wider assortment of tubers you can buy online, visit Classic Caladiums, classicaladiums.com.

