

CALADIUMS IN THE HOME GARDEN

By:

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Fancy-leaved Caladiums (*Caladium bicolor*) provide a great splash of color in shaded areas where many other plants may not thrive. Their large, arrow-shaped, thin, delicate vari-colored leaves come in a wide range of colors. Caladiums are tender tuberous plants. They require high temperatures akin to their native tropical South American habitat.

Caladiums are available in named cultivars (varieties) such as 'Candidum' which has white leaves with green veins. Consult your favorite flower catalog for colors that are appropriate for your garden plan.

Starting Indoors

Four to six weeks should be allowed between starting indoors and planting outdoors. Plan to pot the tubers about May 1. Soils should be high in organic matter and not too acidic. A mix might contain 1 part soil, 2 parts peat and 1 part sand or perlite. For each 6-inch pot of soil mix, incorporate 1 teaspoon of limestone and 1/2 teaspoon of a complete fertilizer such as 5-10-10.

Before planting, the central bud of the tuber can be removed to promote side bud development which results in more leaves. Place the tuber in the pot so that it is covered with 1/2 inch of soil mix.

Temperature Requirements

After potting, keep the tubers at 70-80 degrees. Chilling may injure them. Keep the plants indoors until the second week in June. Then transplant in the garden or outdoor planter.

Watering

Caladiums, with their large leaves, transpire large amounts of water. For this reason, they have a high water requirement and should not be allowed to dry out. If the soil dries out, leaf burning may result. Water regularly and thoroughly but make certain that the soil is not waterlogged.

Fertilizer

During the summer new leaves are occasionally produced. To maintain plant health, fertilize monthly with 5-10-10 at 2 level teaspoons per square foot (2 lbs./100 sq. ft.).

Exposure

Always grow caladiums in the shade or semi-shade. Overexposure causes foliar bleaching or even burning on some of the thinner-leaved cultivars. Avoid windy locations as the thin, delicate leaves are easily damaged.

Storing Tubers

Caladiums may be grown for many years. The tubers will grow and multiply with proper care. When the leaves begin to wilt, and before frost, lift them, shake off the soil, and spread in the

warm sun to dry. Allow to dry for about a week, then remove the leaves from the tubers. Make certain that the temperature does not drop below 60°F.

Store in onion bags or nylon panty hose in an area that does not go below 60° and is not excessively hot and dry. Or, leave soil on the tubers to protect them from excessive desiccation. They should remain healthy until the time arrives to plant them again, about May 1. Inspect tubers carefully before replanting and discard any rotted ones.

Note: This article was prepared for publication in the PLANT LIFE series and is available as a leaflet.