

CALADIUMS

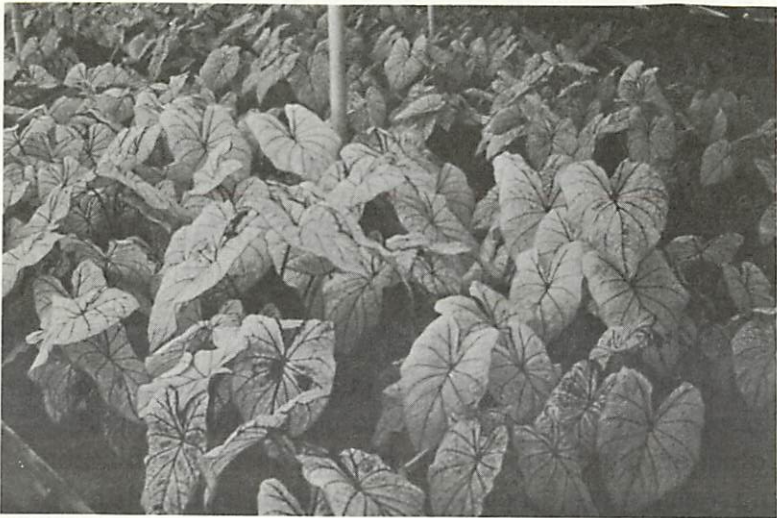
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Caladiums are colorful, tropical perennials native to South America. Elephant ears, as they are known, are a novelty which few growers bother to handle. They are easy to grow and are popular for garden center sales. They are most useful for cool, shady beds or planters where annuals are difficult to grow.

Initial cost of tubers is low and sales price is good. They may be grown in 4" pots and sold young, or finished in 6" pots grown pot-to-pot until the last few weeks when they are spaced and allowed to fill out.

Plant directly into 3 or 4-inch pots using a loose soil mix. Force at 60-65 degrees with bottom heat. They may be started in 5 or 6-inch pots for larger plants.

To make large specimens, caladiums may be started in December and make a fine companion crop for Easter lilies. Caladiums may be started in flats filled with wet peat moss in a warm place or on shelves. Since they root from the top, start them upside down, leaving about half the tuber protruding above the peat to avoid rot. Merely press the tuber firmly into the peat. Direct potting frequently leads to severe losses due to rot from over-watering in mid-winter. Tubers will sprout in about 10 days, then should be potted in a light soil mix. Bottom heat is very desirable. When potting directly in soil, plant them on a slant so that water does not collect in the depression in the tuber.



Since caladium tubers tend to sprout from a single bud or eye, only a few large leaves are produced. Smaller side buds grow later. To obtain a more compact plant with more leaves, side buds may be forced by several methods. 1) If planted upside down, more side buds will develop. 2) Tubers may be quartered and the quarters planted back to back. 3) Remove the center bud prior to planting by cutting it out.

Caladiums grow best in an organic soil mix with very good drainage. The mix should be amended with limestone to a pH of 6.0-6.5. Superphosphate (0-20-0) should be added at 5 lbs. per cubic yard. Fertilize with 20-5-30 (20 oz/100 gals.) or 15-0-22 (equal parts calcium and potassium nitrates at 27 oz/100 gals.) to provide 300 ppm N at every fourth watering or every 2-3 weeks.

Caladiums require a minimum night temperature of 70°F to do well in early stages of growth but prefer 80°F. They can be finished more slowly at 60-

65°F. Watering should be light until foliage is well developed. Keep the humidity high but avoid splashing water on the leaves.

Caladium leaves develop the brightest colors at about 5000 foot-candles of light. This means full sun in winter, half shade in spring and summer. Too much shade results in dull colors, too little may cause leaf burn.

There are dozens of horticultural varieties, most derived from two species: Colocasia bicolor and Colocasia picturatum. C. bicolor is more common in greenhouses. Leaves are ovalish, colored in various patterns but bluish-green or metallic beneath, the leaf stalk at least four times longer than the blade. C. picturatum has leaves more or less lance-shaped, variously colored above but paler beneath.

Try caladiums to attract attention to your sales area all season, particularly for early sales when many annuals are still green.