

# Care and Handling

## CALLAS, CAREFULLY

> Just as movies immortalize actors, the 1937 “Stage Door” did the same for callas. The character played by Katharine Hepburn so loved the flower and found it fitting for her most memorable moments. “The calla lilies are in bloom again. Such a strange flower ... suitable to any occasion,” she said in the film. “I carried them on my wedding day, and now I place them here in memory of something that has died.”

Callas’ versatility continues to make them a star, especially at weddings and events.

Callas, also known as Arum or trumpet lilies, are not related to the lily family (*Lilium*) but are members of the *Zantedeschia* family. The calla grows from a type of bulb called a rhizome. Native to Southern Africa, many are now grown in temperate climates in the U.S. and South America. The showy, colored spathe is the leaf-like organ that surrounds the true flower, the thick, tubular-shaped spadix.

Stem length, stem diameter and color differentiate the large standard callas and the miniature callas. Standard callas are between 3 to 6 inches in length and 3 to 4 inches in width with stem lengths ranging from 20 to 30 inches or more. Their large, sturdy stems make them ideal for large vase arrangements or single flowers for wedding ceremonies.

Miniature callas range from about 1.5 to 3 inches in length and about 2 to 2.5 inches wide with stem lengths ranging from 8 to 32 inches. Although they lose some inches of stem diameter, miniatures maintain their sturdiness. The newer green calla lilies, commonly known as ‘Green Goddess’ callas, range in color from solid dark green to pale green with a creamy white to light yellow throat. ‘Green Goddess’ callas tend to be slightly smaller than their standard cousins — but just as sturdy.

### Purchasing Hints

Flowers are harvested either when the flower has opened (“open cut”) or prior to flower opening (“closed cut”). When harvested at the closed cut stage, flowers will not fully open — so this is the preferred cut to put in front of your suppliers.

The spadix should be visible and free of spots and blemishes when it arrives

in your shop. Buy flowers close to the time needed, as they do not store well. If you do need to store them, hold at 33°F to 35°F for no longer than three days.

### Prompt Processing

Pack callas soon after they arrive in the shop. Handle only the stems — avoid touching the flower heads, because they bruise easily. Cut at least 1 inch off the bottom of the stem with a sharp blade, leaving some of the white stem, the portion that was underground. This reduces the chances of stem-splitting and aids in water uptake and vase life.

After cutting, place stems directly into a clean container filled with a freshly mixed flower food solution. Long stems may need tall containers or buckets for support. Allow flowers to hydrate several hours to overnight in a room that’s between 65°F to 72°F and in lighted conditions so they can take up as much water as possible. Keep away from direct sunlight, drafts and vents for heating and cooling.

### Maximizing Vase life

After hydration, re-cut stems with a sharp blade and place in freshly made flower food. Re-cutting the stems every 24 to 48 hours helps prevent the stems from splitting and curling up. If a stem splits, re-cut the stem, eliminating only the affected area to maximize stem length saved.

Callas are not ethylene sensitive, although some research has shown a benefit when pre-treated at harvest with STS. It is always a good idea to keep all flowers away from ethylene sources and ripening fruit. Take special precaution to keep away from ethylene sources when mixing callas with other flower species.



**STYLISH AND STURDY** Buy from quality suppliers and follow proper processing and you can enjoy callas for up to two weeks.

When arranging callas, remember to handle by the stem to preserve flower quality. When using callas in body flowers, wait at least 30 minutes after you’ve removed a finished piece from water before pinning it to avoid water stains — callas can retain sufficient amounts of water in their stems.

Callas can maintain their beauty between four days to two weeks, depending on the variety, their treatment and display location. To ensure your customers enjoy these stars’ glamour, always provide flower food packets and tell customers to avoid placing callas in direct sun or near drafts, refrigerators, televisions or any heat-generating appliance. Because callas are sensitive to bacteria that can accumulate in floral solutions, advise customers to recut the stems and place in a fresh solution every three days.

With proper care and placement, these beauties won’t fade from the spotlight. 🌸

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