

Caladium

General Information:

The caladium is a tuber. It stocks food in an underground stem, having a tough skin that generates roots from many parts of its surface. Usually short, fat, and rounded, it has a knobby surface with growth buds, or eyes, from which the shoots of the new plant emerge. Caladiums produce new tubers that grow from the sides of the original ones.

Caladiums have colorful foliage from early summer to frost, merit display in groupings, and are excellent in pots or planters. They are natives to the jungle river banks in South America. Use in pot combinations or as a shade garden annual.

Temperature:

They are tender, or susceptible to cold. Dormant tubers cannot stand temperatures that fall below 55° F. Thus, they must be dug up in fall before night temperatures reach freezing. They cannot be set out again until dependably warm weather is due. Caladiums adapt to almost any good garden soil as long as it is well-drained, and outdoor temperatures are consistently above 60°F.

Light:

Part shade to full shade. No more than 2 hours sun indoors or out.

Fertilizer:

Caladiums, being in ground half the year or less, should be given a complete fertilizer during the growing season. Apply a dusting to soil around each plant in a circular band beginning about 6 inches from stems and extending outward another 12 inches, up to 18 inches for larger plants. Scratch into the soil and then water. For plants that have been protected by mulch, scatter on mulch and water it into the soil. Do not over-fertilize.

Water:

Water thoroughly when soil is slightly dry.

Preparing for dormant period:

When the leaves start to die, withhold water and store dry tubers at 60° to 70° F. for two months in dry packing material, or leave in dry pots.

Propagation:

They can be propagated in spring by cutting them in sections, each with at least one large bud, or eye. Dust the cut surfaces with fungicide powder, let the pieces dry for two days, and then plant them. Place knobby side up beneath 2 inches of soil. Plant one large or 2 to 3 small tubers per 8 in. pot. In garden beds, space 8 to 12 inches apart.