



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

Caladium Color To Die For

Seven to eight months of color from a tuber that requires little care is unprecedented hereabouts. Other bulbous plants such as amaryllis, blood lily, society garlic, and our native zephyr/rain lily can't hold a petal to the performance of caladiums. The fact that worldwide, the major growers of these amazing plants are clustered a two-hour drive south of Orlando in Lake Placid is remarkable. There in late July, you will find the Caladium Festival which includes tours of some of the 1,500 acres of fields of caladiums.

However, the growers do more than just grow the tubers, they also breed them. If you grew up with shade-only varieties or standards such as the lovely Miss Muffet and Carolyn Whorton, hold onto your trowel. Now, varieties include those that grow in the sun, reach different heights and have fantastic variegated foliage - they are versatile and colorful as heck. We are talking major eye candy for your garden. Look for more recently bred caladiums called Frog in a Blender (shades of green variegation), Tapestry (red and green and emerges early) and Cherry Tart (bright red lance-leaved).

There are two types of caladiums -

fancy leaved and strap/lance leaved. Fancy-leaved caladiums are larger and heart shaped while the more compact strap-leaved are narrow, elongated and lend themselves for use in flower arrangements because of their lasting quality as cut foliage. They also work well in hanging baskets.

Use caladiums (*Caladium bicolor*) in the ground, containers, or hanging baskets. Established caladiums typically push their foliage above ground starting in April as the soil temperatures rise above 60 degrees Fahrenheit. The foliage starts to decline many months later in autumn as the temperatures decline.

Plant caladium tubers with the

pointed growing tips up, in well-draining soil and cover with one to two inches of soil. Keep them moist and fertilize every two months during the warm months to keep them big and bouncy. Leaf size and longevity are directly related to the size of the tubers and care. Here in Central Florida a two to three-inch layer of organic mulch will protect the bulbs from the cold and they can stay in the ground. In colder climates, containers or dug bulbs can be stored dry in temperatures above 70 degrees. This low maintenance perennial takes only minutes to plant and provides months of cheerful foliage color.



Top row, left to right: Frog in a Blender is happy in the ground or in a container. Fiesta at the fence and Miss Muffet. White Wing (strap type) brightens a shady area. Bottom: Carolyn Whorton shown here in light shade also takes full sun.



WHERE TO BUY CALADIUM BULBS

Volunteers from Winter Park Blooms (a committee of the Keep Winter Park Beautiful & Sustainable Advisory Board) sells an amazing selection of caladium bulbs at Winter Park Farmers Market on Saturday mornings in March (except the 18th) and April from 8 a.m. until noon. Proceeds fund beautification projects and hosting the America in Bloom judges who visit Winter Park April 24th and 25th. Find caladiums along with information at the base of the stairs to the historic freight depot. Find Winter Park Blooms and KWPB&S news on Facebook and www.cityofwinterpark.org/kwpb.