



Wendy G. Ulrich  
Lab Technician, C. Beaty Hannah Horticulture & Environmental Center  
News Release

## **Caladiums add dramatic color to the landscape**

**Question:** I have seen caladiums in other people's yards and they are beautiful. Every time I try to grow them they struggle and never seem to do well, what am I doing wrong?

**Answer:** The problem you're having could depend on timing, soil type, light intensity, or a half dozen other things, so I'll start by giving optimum growing conditions for caladiums in general. As with many plants, caladiums do have some requirements to be in their "Happy Place." Let's see if we can get you headed in the right direction so you can become one of those "other people" with beautiful caladiums in your yard!

Caladiums (*Caladium × hortulanum* Birdsey) are grown for their spectacular, multicolored foliage and are considered tropical, therefore they respond well to warm, moist soil with soil temperatures about 70°F and above. For a scheduled planting date you might want to consider planting them outside about the same time you would plant okra seed as they require similar soil temperature. If caladium tubers are planted in cooler soils they tend to grow slowly and the tubers might even rot before they get going. Caladiums are popular planted in pots, borders, and as bedding plants throughout the south and they perform best in dappled or moderately shady locations for best growth and color. You will need to keep the soil moist, but do not allow the plants to stay water saturated, especially if they are in containers. Caladiums will benefit from regular feeding with a soluble type fertilizer.

You may purchase caladiums as tubers or as already started plants. There are two main cultivars of caladium, the fancy and lance leafed types. The fancy leafed caladium with its large, heart shaped leaves will reach heights of 12 to 30 inches depending on variety and growing conditions. The lance leafed type usually grows smaller and has narrower leaves. Both come in many different color combinations and many have interesting color variations. For the most impact in the landscape, group caladiums as a focal point in mass plantings. When planted in the foreground they will provide a striking contrast with the green foliage of other plants.

If you purchase tubers, the larger tubers will have more leaf buds and provide a larger plant. Each tuber will have a large central bud surrounded by smaller buds. Removing this central bud will allow the tuber to produce many more shoots and leaves. To carefully remove the central bud, use the tip of a sharp knife to lift it out, being careful not to damage the smaller surrounding buds.

Caladiums do not winter over here in Alabama, but by taking some simple steps it is possible to save the tubers to use again next year. Before the foliage loses its color in the fall, dig up the tubers and spread them out to dry for about a week. When dry, remove the dried foliage and soil from the tubers and pack them in dry peat moss or vermiculite, making sure the tubers do not touch each other. Store the tubers in a low humidity area where the temperature will not drop below 50° F. Normally the tubers will not perform as well the second year. Some varieties respond better than others; you may have better luck with the white colored foliage sprouting the second year. If you like a challenge, wintering them over may be worth a try.

Caladiums do not have many problems. Sometimes the leaves will show burning on the outer edges which could be from watering during the hot part of the day, watering too little, or from fertilizer touching the leaves. Planting caladiums too early in the spring in cooler temperatures could cause leaf spot, showing tan to brown spots on leaves. These diseased leaves should be removed immediately. If you would like more in-depth information please view our publication titled *Greenhouse Production of Caladiums, ANR 1256* online at [www.aces.edu/StClair](http://www.aces.edu/StClair), or stop by the St. Clair County Extension office located on the lower level of the St. Clair County Courthouse in Pell City to pick up a copy.

For more about this topic please contact Wendy Ulrich, Lab Technician, at the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or email [ulricwg@aces.edu](mailto:ulricwg@aces.edu).