

Caladiums

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Spring is just around the corner (if it's not already here) and this is when we start dreaming of adding new things to the garden. I came across a new bulletin that the University of Florida put out that got me thinking that a lot of people probably have a place or two to put in some caladiums.

I love plants that once planted, continue to multiply and caladiums fit that description. Caladiums are colorful and add a tropical look to the landscape. They are low growing bulb plants that can be planted either in front of or under other plants. It doesn't matter what light conditions you have, full sun, partial shade or full shade because there are caladium that will do well in all light conditions. One note of caution though, caladiums are poisonous so, if there are pets or small children that may eat them you should be careful to plant them where they can't be reached!

Not only can caladiums be planted in sun, partial shade or shade but they can also be grown in containers and hanging baskets. Wow, they can be used almost anywhere! If you want to plant them in any kind of a container just be sure that it has good drainage with at least one drainage hole. Be sure to use a potting mix that is light weight and fast draining too. This will help to ensure that the plants don't suffer from soil that stays too wet. If you are going to be planting in a new area then amend the soil in the entire bed with a layer of organic matter (compost or aged manure) four to six inches thick and then mix it in. After mixing the organic matter and sand together then add another layer of organic matter, about an inch thick, over the leveled soil. At this point planting can begin. After the new plants have been planted then water them in thoroughly and mulch. For areas where you already have established plants just plant the caladiums where ever you want and then mulch.

The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) initiated a caladium breeding program in 1976 at the Gulf Coast Research and Education Center in Bradenton Florida. So far, this has been the only major organized caladium breeding program in the world. Here is information on some of their releases.

For caladiums that have white and green fancy-leaf type foliage there is Florida Blizzard, which has a mixture of white and green, and Florida Moonlight which is mainly white with a thin green edge around the leaf. These caladiums grow best when they are in partial sun to shady locations.

The Florida Cardinal caladium is a red fancy-leaf type that has bright red in the center of the leaf with a broad green boarder around the leaf. It will have the best color when planted in a location that is shady. If you are looking for a plant to add pink to your landscape try the Florida Roselight (bright pink and green), Florida Elise (light pink and green) or Florida Calypso (bright pink and light pink with green). They can be planted in sunny or shady locations and they have improved sun tolerance over many of the traditional pink cultivars such as Kathleen, where the pink leaf color can fade to an unappealing tan color when grown in sunny locations.

If you have shady spots you can grow Florida Fantasy (bright pink mid-vein with white leaf blade and green border) and Florida Sunrise (bold red veins surrounded by green).

There are many caladiums available with many colorful selections so if you are interested in brightening up the areas underneath your shrubs, in front of your shrubs, in containers on your porch or in hanging baskets, you may want to add a few caladiums this spring.