

Tom's Garden

Blog December 2021

Calla and Canna Lilies

Quick Facts

Canna and calla lilies grow well in hot sites throughout Ohio in summer. Though the names are similar, the plants are not similar, and neither one is an actual lily!

Canna and calla lilies are not hardy, but can be grown as annuals, houseplants, or their rhizomes can be overwintered inside.

Both come in many different flower colors and leaf types, and make a dramatic statement in the garden.

Calla Lilies

Calla lilies or callas (*Zantedeschia* species) are not true lilies. They are related to jack-in-the-pulpit and caladium.

Callas have a broad, trumpet-shaped flower called a spathe that wraps around the finger-like spadix.



The spathe is actually a modified leaf and may be white, yellow, orange, red, pink or purple in color.

The spadix holds the tiny, true flowers.

Calla leaves are arrowhead-shaped and solid green or green with silver or white flecks.

The white calla is native to Africa where it is considered a weed. The flowers can be quite large, up to 10 inches long and a yellow spadix. It also has become naturalized in warm parts of the U.S., such as California, where it is considered an invasive species. Because it is not hardy in Minnesota or Ohio, it is not invasive here. Callas may be grown as houseplants, in a sunny location, but for best results, plant callas outside in summer and enjoy them as cut flowers. They bloom mid to late summer for about a month.

Callas thrive in a deep, moist, rich soil in full sun. They will grow in part shade, but will not bloom as well. White callas will grow in boggy and alkaline soils. Set rhizomes four to six inches deep and one to two feet apart. Fertilize in spring after planting them with 5-10-5 or 5-10-10 fertilizer.

Canna Lilies

Canna lilies or cannas (*canna x generalis*) are native to tropical and sub-tropical areas. They are not hardy in our USDA zone. Like callas, their rhizomes must be dug up in the fall after frost has blackened the foliage. Cannas grow 2 to 5 feet or more, depending on variety. Their large, glossy leaves are 6 to 12 inches wide. The exotic leaves come in bronze, purple, burgundy, bright green, dark green or multi-colored. Cannas are ornamental even without flowers.



Their blossoms are clustered at the top of flower spikes which can be up to one foot long. Blossom size varies with species, and colors can be red, rose/pink, yellow, orange, salmon and red with yellow. They make a very tropical-like planting for a large container, in raised beds or as a background plant. The flowers attract bumblebees and hummingbirds. Cannas may be started indoors by planting them in pots, then transplanting them outside. They can also be planted into the garden soil when it has warmed and all danger of frost has passed. Plant the rhizomes 3 to 4 inches deep and 1 to 3 feet apart. Cannas grow best in full sun and hot weather, providing they have enough moisture and soil high in organic matter. They bloom mid-summer to frost. In fall, dig up the rhizomes, cut the stems back to 2 to 3 inches, and let them dry.



Leave them in a box in the basement or somewhere cool where they will not freeze. When dividing in spring, each piece must have an eye, or growing point on it.

Extension.umu.edu/flowers/calla-and-canna-lilies

I was taught by my grandfather to love and value native bees, spiders, snakes and other creepy crawly critters. These are pollinators, predators and beneficials that help maintain our gardens and landscapes. The move to kill all insects and so-called pests comes from manufacturers who make lots of money selling pesticides and herbicides.

More and more people are beginning to realize that we are in danger of losing all those little things that run the world and are all interconnected. We need to take care of the tiny creatures that we have been trained to be afraid of and let them take care of us.....Tom

Arugula

In the world of plants, few have such a long and noble history as arugula.

Eruca, as the Romans called it was recorded in the first century AD. Arugula was known before that. The plant is mentioned in the Old Testament, in the Second Book of Kings, sixth century BC where it is referred to as “oroth.”

In Italy, where the plant never went out of fashion, regional dialects changed the name a bit. In southern Italy it’s called “aruculu”. This became the most commonly name used in the U.S. because most Italian immigrants came from southern Italy. But in the north, it is known as “ruchetta.” This word, along with the crop itself, worked its way over the Alps, becoming “roquette” in French. The English embraced the plant, too, translating the French word to “rocket.”

The plant is recommended for use as one of the “bitter herbs” of Jewish tradition. However, it is not to be eaten by high priests in the seven days leading up to Yom Kippur because of the belief that arugula would “foster impurity.” Arugula’s reputation as an aphrodisiac was widespread throughout Europe and Asia. According to a study published in 2013, arugula leaf extracts boosted testosterone levels and sperm activity in mice. The results suggest that the phytochemicals and/or nutrients in arugula could have aphrodisiac properties.

Its cultivation was prohibited in many Medieval monasteries. Love potions included arugula and many other herbs such as lavender.

So the bottom line is; Have a quiet candlelight dinner with your spouse and don’t forget the arugula salad!



The birth flower for December is, of course, The Poinsettia. It symbolizes good cheer, and success. The poinsettia has been hybridized to produce many different colors and even multi-colors. “You Are The Special One” is the message this flower sends for you.

December is named for the Latin word decem, “ten,” because this had been the tenth month of the early Roman calendar.

Christmas Trees

The first retail Christmas tree lot was established in 1851 by a Pennsylvania man named Mark Carr, who hauled two ox sleds loaded with Christmas trees from the Catskill Mountains to the sidewalk of New York City.

In 1882, the first tree lights were sold in New York City.

