

If you are a caladium fanatic, you are probably aware that it's about time to dig tubers and store them away for the winter months. We have enjoyed the green, white, red and pink heart or lance shaped foliage of these beautiful plants through the summer and fall, but as the temperatures dip below 60 degrees, the plants quickly die back to the ground. The below-ground tubers need to be lifted before the ground temperature also falls to 60 degrees.

Caladiums are native to the tropics, with many coming from the Amazon basin in Brazil. Although they are enjoyed as pot plants or annuals throughout the U.S., they can be grown year round in south Florida where they don't die down in the winter. In central Florida, the foliage may die back, but the ground stays warm enough to leave the tubers in the ground all winter. Here in the northern part of the state, however, the tubers must be dug because they will be permanently damaged by our winter ground temperature.

The temperatures have dipped low enough here to injure the above ground plant. When the leaves and stems turn yellow and begin to droop, it is time to dig the tubers. If you wait too long, you may lose sight of their exact location in the ground and damage the tubers when digging. Carefully lift the tubers, clean off the soil, and place the dried tubers in dry peat moss or sand. They should be stored for the winter where the temperature remains above 70 degrees, but no higher than 90 degrees.

Tubers can be planted out again in the spring garden when the danger of frost has passed and the soil has warmed to 65 degrees or higher. The UF/IFAS recommendation is to plant the first of May in the northern part of the state. The soil should be prepared by working it to a depth of at least six inches, incorporating a complete fertilizer, and lightly pre-watering to evenly moisten the area. Plant the tubers about two inches deep with the growing points facing upward. If you remember to periodically fertilize your plants and keep the soil from drying out, you will enjoy the beauty of their colorful fancy leaves until it's time to dig again...

These plants are gaining in popularity all across Florida. Traditionally, caladiums have been used to brighten up shady sites in the landscape. But with the development of many stunning sun tolerant cultivars, homeowners with sun or shade can enjoy the colorful foliage in their landscape design. In sunny areas, the soil will tend to dry much more quickly than in shady locations. Caladiums need moist soil, so amend the soil with plenty of organic matter to improve the water holding capacity. Some plants that perform best in full sun include the white cultivars Candidum Junior and Seagull; the pink cultivars Carolyn Whorton, Rosebud and Pink Gem; and the red cultivars Fire Chief and Red Frill.

If you are interested in growing caladiums in pots and containers, read more of the UF/IFAS publication at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg278> The Master Gardeners also answer your gardening questions and give free soil pH tests on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday mornings at the Columbia County Extension Office. 752-5384
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