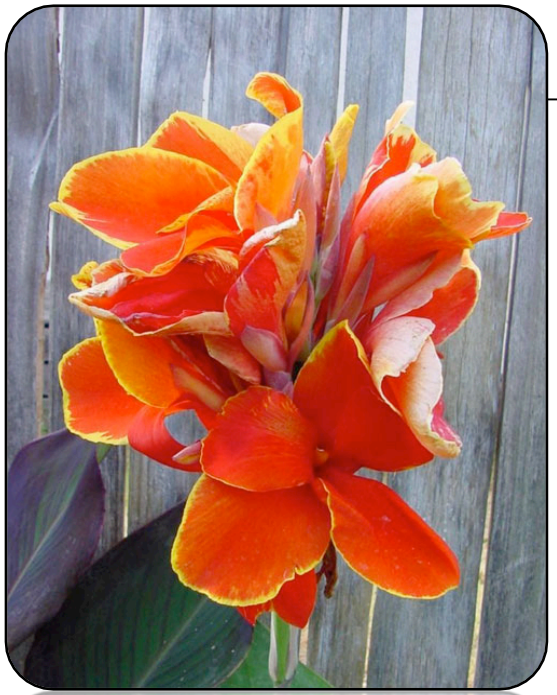

Canna

Home owners, who grow Canna plants, do so for two big reasons. First, these plants have bright and attractive foliage. Second, they have colorful gladiolus-like flowers. Colors include light orange, pink, coral, and apricot. Isn't it about time you started growing Cannas, too!?

Cannas are native to Asia and Latin America. They are also called "Indian Shot", getting their name from their hard, pea-like seeds. There are many varieties suitable for your garden or for use as container plants. There are even varieties of this plant that is grown in water. Plants grow from 18 inches to six feet tall, depending upon variety.

Note: These flower attract hummingbirds.....cool!

Most home gardeners grow Cannas from Rhizomes. After the plants have died back in the fall, dig up the roots. Clean and store them in a cool, dark area until planting the following spring. Canna plants can also be propagated from seed. In southern areas, they can remain in the ground over winter. Add a heavy layer of mulch to protect the rhizomes from freezing.

Plant rhizomes in the spring. Cannas prefer a rich, organic soil, plant in full sun. Canna needs plenty of water, but soil should be well draining (except varieties grown in water).

Divide roots, leaving one or two growing tips on each section. Plant roots 3 to 4 inches deep, separated one to three feet apart. Mix in plenty of compost and organic matter during planting.
Apply a nitrogen rich fertilizer once a month for optimum growth. Keep soil moist all season long.
Avid gardeners mulch around the plants heavily every year to help retain water, and to replenish organic matter.
Avoid overcrowding plants. Separate and replant established plants every three to four years.
In the fall, dig up the roots for storage. The roots will survive over wintering outdoors only in the warmest areas of the country.

Insect and disease problems are infrequent. Use insecticides, organic repellents, and fungicides as needed.

Canna Growing Tips

Cannas are tender tropical perennials that with a little care can be grown in almost all areas. They are heavy feeders and require lots of water to perform at their best. Growing cannas from seed can be quite rewarding and a lot of fun.

Take a small triangular file or pet nail nippers and nick the dark hard outer coat of the Canna seed just until you see the white layer beneath. Start the seeds out on a soak of hot water and let them sit a day or two. Sow the seeds in a good seed medium and place in a warm spot to germinate. Do not let them dry out. In a week or two, the seedlings will be up. Transplant the seedlings to 4"-6" pots to establish before planting out in a sunny location most cannas started from seed will bloom in the first season.

Plant your cannas in the full sun. A minimum of 6 hours direct sunlight is required, the more sunlight, the better. If your cannas are stunted and do not bloom, one reason is that they may not be getting enough sunlight. The ground should have lots of organic materials worked into it, compost, composted manure, leaves, grass clippings and kitchen garbage (peelings), egg shells, coffee grounds but no processed foods like meats, fats or anything of that nature). In other words if it is organic and will decompose, use it.

Plant the rhizome horizontally in the ground with the eyes or growing points facing up, if they are visible. The rhizomes do not have a top or bottom so there is no chance of planting them upside down. Cannas can be planted outside in the early spring after the last frost in your area. Or you can start them sooner indoors, in March away from the frost and cold for an earlier plant and flowers. Plant them 2 to 3 inches deep and 18 to 24 inches apart. They can also be planted for a block effect if you use the same variety or do not mind if the colors or varieties get mixed during growth. To achieve this effect, plant as many as possible about 6 inches apart, when grown this way they can make a very impressive display. After planting, keep the rhizomes moist but not wet. When new growth appears they can be watered more heavily and tolerate wetter soil. Keeping a layer of mulch on and around the cannas will conserve water and will keep the weeds from growing. Some studies now are indicating that composting and mulching can inhibit and even deter some viruses and diseases.

Cannas grown to the colder sides of zones 7 and below will have to be dug to survive winter. Let hard frost take the foliage. In the interim between then and colder conditions you will have a few weeks to prepare your cannas for winter. But don't wait until the ground starts to freeze. A thick layer of mulch will help if you can't get to right away. And if wet and cold temperatures are expected, get the cannas out of the ground .ASAP! Cannas can be stored the winter season so in spring you can enjoy the same lovely plants you had this summer. If your cannas are in pots, you have options. You can leave them in the pots and either bring into the house to a sunny location (southern exposure is best) where they will continue to grow and bloom. Water lightly though the winter months and use a little fertilizer. Some natural “de-scented” fish emulsion fertilizers on the market now does nicely. Follow the manufactures recommendations for plants in pots. Or you can just move the pots to a cool place after removing all the foliage. An area where the temperature is about 50º F is idea and will let the Canna “sleep” until spring water lightly to keep moist during that period. A spray bottle works well for just a little water. If too dry, the roots and rhizomes will dehydrate, and if too wet, rot will set in. So try for a happy medium. You can also set the whole pot inside a clear plastic trash bag and fold loosely over the top. This will help retain moisture so watering may not even be needed.

If cannas are in the ground, dig them up, leaving as much soil around the roots as possible. You will want that soil to be moist, NOT wet. Let sit a few days if too wet. Put the whole “root ball” (clump) inside a large plastic bag (a large trash bag will be fine). Clear bags are nice so you can see what goes on without having to open. Cover any bare roots or rhizomes with damp peat moss, filling the holes, gaps etc. with the peat. "Close" the bag by folding it over loosely and store in a cool place, but where the Canna roots and rhizomes will not freeze. Again a temperature of around 50°F is good. Into spring, you will notice the clumps start to sprout.

As the weather warms and the danger of frost is gone, you can remove the cannas from the bags and plant them according to the above directions. Divide them at this time as your desire, making sure each rhizome has about 3 growing points or eyes. You can also move your pots outside again at this time and divide those clumps, if needed.