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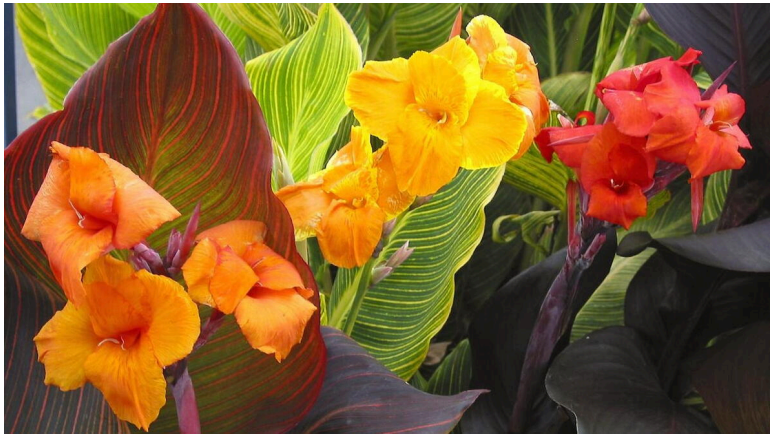
Thursday, May 1, 2025



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How to Grow Cannas (Canna Lilies): The Complete Canna Flower Guide



Canna Tropicanna®: The original Tropicanna,

Botanical Name:	Canna x generalis
Plant	Flower

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Planting, Growing, and Caring for Cannas

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)
Last Updated: March 17, 2025



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Flashy and flamboyant, canna lilies are perennial flowers that thrive in the heat of July and August. Learn how to plant and grow cannas—plus, get instructions for deadheading, cutting back, and overwintering.

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About Cannas

Canna (*Canna Indica*) are unrelated to true lilies, even though they're commonly called "canna lilies." This flowering perennial plant is related to bananas and ginger! This may not be surprising when you consider their huge paddle-shaped leaves in those gorgeous red, orange, and bronze colors.

States. The flowers are somewhat similar to an iris in shape. Their huge leaves wrap in ruffles around stems, tapering to refined buds that open into large, rainbow-hued flowers all summer long, even in intense heat.

Though often called “bulbs,” cannas are not true bulbs as they multiply beneath the soil from a rhizome, an underground stem.

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Also known as Indian shot, canna is a sun-loving tropical or subtropical herbaceous perennial hardy in Zones 7-10. They'll

“I decided that if I could paint that flower in a huge scale, you could not ignore its beauty.”

–Georgia O’Keeffe (1887–1986), speaking of her work titled *Red Canna*

Cannas can be both focal points and stylish accents. Use them to bring structure as a tall border or to add depth to narrow spaces. They add a colorful splash to garden orders and poolside plantings, bring a tropical touch to water features, and thrive in boggy areas (NOT salt water). Mix cannas with grasses, lantana, zinnias, snapdragons, elephant ears, salvia, periwinkles, and more.

Note: Canna plants can be left outside in the ground all winter in zones 7 to 10.

They will also grow equally well in large containers dragged inside during the dormant period. In colder climates, cannas are easy to lift and store during cooler months. (Learn more below.)

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PLANTING

Cannas need full sun for good flowering and consistently moist soil with a pH of around 6.0–6.5. Add lime before planting if your garden soil is acidic (low pH). Position plants away from strong wind; their large, soft leaves are vulnerable to damage.

When to Plant Cannas

- Cannas can not tolerate cold tempera-

time when folks put tomatoes in the ground. See our [Planting Calendar](#) for tomato-planting dates. Dig a small hole 2 inches deep and insert a thermometer to determine soil temps.

- In cold, short-season areas, start canna rhizomes in pots indoors or in a greenhouse, ready to transplant outdoors at the right time.

How to Plant Cannas

- Space rhizomes 1-1/2 to 2 feet apart to give cannas enough room. Containers need to be at least 18 inches in diameter (per rhizome).
- Before planting, loosen the soil to a depth of 1 foot, then mix in 2 to 4 inches of compost.
- Dig a hole 2 inches deep and set the rhizome 1 to 2 inches below the soil with the “eyes” (bumps or nodes, which are growth sprouts) pointed up.
- Cover with 1 to 2 inches of soil. Tamp firmly.
- Water thoroughly, then withhold water for as long as three weeks and watch

once a week by slowly soaking the area around the roots.

- Full foliage color develops when days are warmer (59°F or more). Blooms should appear in 10 to 12 weeks.
- Cannas should not need to be staked as they have strong, upright stems.



Canna 'Tropicanna'® 'Autumn Joy' makes for a stunning display in late summer.

Photo Courtesy of Anthony Tesselaar Plants

GROWING

- Cannas need wet soil. If the soil doesn't remain moist, provide a good soaking once a week and every other day during the hottest weeks of summer—water freely in dry spells.
- Maintain a thin layer of mulch to help retain moisture.
- Stake tall varieties, if necessary.

eaters and would benefit from slow-release fertilizer at planting and twice during the growing season. Fish emulsion fertilizer, which is a little higher in nitrogen, is a beneficial organic alternative. Higher nitrogen fertilizers tend to increase canna height. Rose or tomato food products are also suitable.

Deadheading Cannas

- To promote blooming, check your canna every few days to deadhead (i.e., remove spent flowers)
- When deadheading, use small garden pruners or scissors. Do not pinch with your fingers.
- Canna stems grow several flowers on a single stem. Snip off only the spent flower where it joins the main stem, leaving the other spikes to continue to bloom.
- Once all the flowers on a single canna spike have bloomed, you may cut that part of the stem back, but avoid cutting off any new budding spikes.

After the entire plant has been dead-headed several times and with flowers no longer forthcoming, cut the flower stem back to the foliage.

Only at the end of the growing season should you cut the plant—down to around 6 inches off the ground.

If the plant looks “trashy” or the leaves get sunburnt, however, you can simply trim off the brown edges (like a haircut) or trim off any dead leaves at the bottom near the stem.

Be careful not to nick the main stem. If the stem is damaged, cut it back to the ground.

You may see seed pods on your canna!
These seed pods will make more cannas,
so you can clip them off and put them
right in the soil of your cannas; it may
take a few years to get going, but you'll
have more cannas in the future.

How to Store Cannas for Winter

In zones 7/8 and warmer, cannas can be left in the ground year-round. After frost kills the foliage, cut in-ground plants back to 4 inches. Add a healthy layer of straw or leaf mulch in the fall to protect rhizomes from the cold as the plants overwinter in place. (Note: Zone 7 doesn't always experience canna-killing winter temperatures, so it's a judgment call.)

Bring cannas grown in pots indoors into a garage or basement for winter. Keep them dry (do not water) until spring's nighttime temperatures are consistently above 50°F., typically after the tulips have

.. .. . - . .

In zones 6 or colder, it is necessary to dig up (lift) in-ground cannas in the fall and bring them inside for the winter. After cutting the canna back (as above), dig out the rhizome with a shovel. Avoid damaging the rhizome by digging about 1 foot away from the stem. With your hands, gently loosen the soil and lift out the clump. Shake off the soil and cut off any foliage. Divide clumps into 3 to 5 rhizomes, each with eyes.

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Cure the rhizomes in the sun or in a garage or closet for a few days to toughen them up and help them resist rot. Wrap

growing medium, such as peat moss, to absorb moisture and prevent rot. Rhizomes should not touch each other.

Store cannas over the winter in a dry place where the temperature will not drop below 40°. Often, this is a basement, attic, or garage. Check the rhizomes a couple of times over the winter to make sure that they don't dry out. Mist with a bit of water, as needed. If you find rot, trip it away or discard the entire rhizome.

When spring's nighttime temperatures are consistently above 50°F., replant outdoors. Make sure each divided piece has at least one eye; from it, new leaves will grow. Blooms should appear in 10 to 12 weeks.

Types

- **'City of Portland'**: 4 to 5 feet tall; green foliage with coral-pink flowers
- **Ehemann's canna**: 5 to 8 feet tall; green foliage with deep rose-pink flowers
- **'Pretoria'** aka Bengal Tiger: 4 to 6 feet

- **‘Futurity Red’**: 2 to 4 feet tall, on average; burgundy foliage with crimson flowers; self-cleaning (drops spent flowers)
- **‘Toucan Yellow’**: 2 1/2 to 4 feet tall; deep green foliage with golden-yellow flowers
- For a tall canna, the Canna Tropicanna® is a popular choice. Growing 4 to 6 feet tall, ‘Tropicanna’® boasts tangerine, iris-like blooms and exotic bronze foliage. Plant in the back of your garden bed or large containers for a dramatic statement on your porch or patio.



Canna Tropicanna®

- A medium-size gem is **‘Los Angeles’**,

Growing 4 to 5 feet tall, this canna blooms from June to August.



Photo Credit: Mick49/Shutterstock

As well as medium- to tall-size cannas, you can find smaller “dwarf” sizes and dramatic “giant” sizes!

- **Dwarf cannas** stand 2 to 4 feet tall and are easy to fit into our downsized modern gardens. The ‘**Picasso**’ is a real attention-getter with bright yellow flowers and deep red leopard-like spots; it blooms from July to frost. The ‘**Wyoming**’ has dark burgundy stems and lush orange flowers that bring life to a quiet bed from mid-summer until frost.
- Interested in a **giant canna**? One of the most popular is the ‘**Musifolia**,’ which grows up to 8 feet! With 3-foot-

HARVESTING

To create an indoor arrangement with a tropical feel, cut the canna flower stems. Although the flowers themselves only last a day or two, their foliage makes for a stunning backdrop in many bouquets.

GARDENING PRODUCTS



PESTS/DISEASES

- Canna are seldom bothered by deer nor prone to disease. Rust, fungal leaf

rot may happen when cannas are kept too wet and crowded.

- Cannas rarely have issues with pests, though caterpillars can munch on leaves. Slugs, snails, spider mites, and caterpillars are the most common culprits.

WIT AND WISDOM

- Cannas' bright flowers may attract hummingbirds.
- The name "canna" comes from the Greek word *kanna*, meaning "reed" or reed-like plant.
- During the Victorian era, gardeners so loved cannas that they grew them from seed, but this isn't easy. The germination rate is low, and the seeds need to be filed or given an acid bath to break down their hard coat.
- Canna seeds, being perfectly round and hard like BB pellets, have been used in jewelry, prayer beads, and baby rattles.
- Canna has been cultivated as a food crop in Central and South America for

edible; the foliage is used as animal fodder when feed is scarce.

FLOWERS

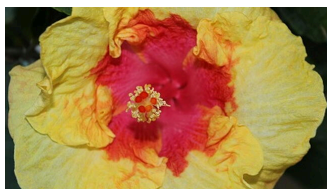
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Boeckmann



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

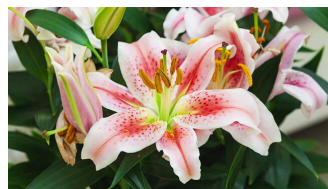
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COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

Karen (not verified) 1 year ago

My Cannas leaves have something eating holes in them. What can I use to avoid this that is not toxic?

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REPLY

The Editors 1 year ago

Hi, Karen. Cannas are susceptible to canna leaf rollers, Japanese beetles, root-knot nematodes, slugs, snails, and spider mites, just to name a few. Since you are not sure exactly what is eating your plants leaves, try treating with neem oil. It can control many pesky pests.

REPLY

A comment and a question. First there is a caterpillar, (leaf roller?) that rolls the leaves/prevents leaves from unrolling, which are detrimental to cannas and will make the plants really ugly, as they munch holes in the rolled-up leaves. I have never been able to avoid these, even though living in several places in the state.

The question is, "Is any part of the canna edible?"

REPLY

The Editors 1 year ago

Hi, Olinda. Canna tubers can be eaten raw or cooked.

REPLY

Nan Gordon (not verified) 1 year 3 months ago

I purchased grown Cannas in pots that had finished blooming, I want to plant these in my

grounds or separate the roots and plant then directly? Thanks for your advice, I look forward to a beautiful display.

REPLY

Shirley Farris (not verified) 10

months 4 weeks ago

Can I leave my canna lily in the pot they were planted or do they need lots of room for planting. (Medium size pot)

REPLY

The Editors 10 months 3 weeks ago

Hi Shirley,

Canna lilies are tall plants with extensive root systems so they need large, sturdy containers—at least 18 inches in diameter per rhizome—to thrive. It is likely that your medium pot will not be sufficient enough for your plant to reach its full potential, so it would be

growth and reduce the chance that it will become top heavy and tip over as it matures.

Given that your plant is in the midst of its growing season, you will want to wait until it finishes blooming for the season and its foliage begins to die back before transplanting to a new container. When you do transplant, you will want to use fresh potting mix and follow the planting tips outlined above.

Hope this helps!

REPLY

The Editors 1 year 3 months ago

Hi Nan,

You should leave you canna plants in the container during the winter months. Depending on how low temperatures are expected to get, you

indoors and place in a cool,
dry location.

In the spring, you can then remove the rhizomes and plant them directly into the ground. Depending on the size of your rhizomes, you can also divide at this time. Just make sure each divided piece has at least one eye. If you chose not to divide, remember that cannas should be divided every 3 to 4 years.

When planting in the ground, give your cannas room to grow as the rhizomes will spread.

REPLY

Kathy outside ... (not verified) 1 year 5 months ago

Really enjoyed your article on Cannas almost as much as I enjoy Cannas. I'm in Zone 7b near Richmond, VA. Here, the leaf rollers are absolutely prolific, and the moths that lay the eggs must love my gardens. When I'm more consci-

Cannas in different beds to make that too time consuming.

I understand you should not cover Cannas in the ground with heavy mulch, which I did once and lost EVERY one of them. So I'm thinking a light cover of peat mulch on entire beds might be good. What is your opinion ?

REPLY

Leah (not verified) 1 year 6 months ago

Cannas are also good for cleaning up any contamination in the soil, be it pesticides, oil slicks, road runoff and more. The plants should then be dug out and thrown away at the end of the growing season to remove the contamination they sucked up.

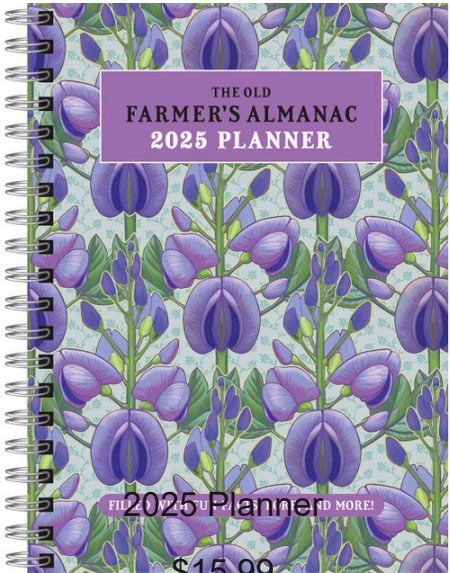
Several universities (including U Cal) are researching canna's ability to clean up all sorts of pollution.

After a minor (3gal) oil spill at my house a few years ago, I used cannas to suck up the oil that had soaked into the soil. The next year the area

REPLY

MORE COMMENTS

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