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# How to Grow Calla Lilies: The Complete Calla Lily Flower Guide



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Botanical name:  
*Zantedeschia spp.*

Plant type: [Flower](#)

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# Planting, Growing, and Caring

By [Andy Wilcox](#)**Last Updated:** April 15, 2024

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Calla lilies, with their elegant tubular shape and fantastic colors (not just white!), add grace to perennial gardens, patio containers, and cutting gardens in the summer; their blooms last for weeks, attracting butterflies and hummingbirds. Learn how to plant, grow, and care for calla lily flower bulbs.

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## About Calla Lilies

Calla lilies are not true lilies and belong to the genus *Zantedeschia*. Native to south-

However, they can be grown as annuals or in containers, even as houseplants, throughout the rest of the country. Planted in spring, the flowers bloom for 6 to 12 weeks through the summer.

Beautiful trumpet-shaped blooms and long, sword-shaped foliage make calla lilies a favorite flower for weddings, borders, and colorful containers. The flower is made of a spathe and a spadix, like a caladium or jack-in-the-pulpit. The spathe is a modified leaf that curls around the spadix; that's the spike-y thing in the center.

Calla lilies are available in many colors, including white, yellow, burgundy, near-black, rose, pink, orange, and multi-color varieties. They range from 1 to 3 feet tall, and typically one rhizome will spread out to about a foot in diameter.

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## PLANTING

Calla lilies will enjoy full sun or partial sun.

Although the biggest and brightest blooms result from planting in full sun, in hotter areas, they may do better with some afternoon shade. They like moist soil well worked with organic matter and good drainage. Don't be lulled by the fact they want moist soil. Soggy conditions can cause their rhizomes to rot.

If planting calla lilies as houseplants, give them a sunny spot. The southern-facing

*Philodendron* will be just right for a pot of calla lilies.

## When to Plant Calla Lilies

Calla lilies are summer-blooming bulbs so they are planted in the spring after all danger of frost has passed. Ideally, soil temperature should be 65 degrees or warmer. Cool temps will cause them to temporarily stop growing.

If you want to get a jump start on your calla lilies, they can be planted in pots a month or two before they go outside. Use a large enough pot so they won't become rootbound, and don't forget to harden them off.



## How to Plant Calla Lilies

Calla lilies are rhizomes but don't look like your typical long, fat rhizome root. They are basically round and look a bit like a lumpy, bumpy cookie that would fit in the palm of your hand. Check out this page from Clemson Cooperative Extension for more details on [how to plant calla lilies](#).

- Work some compost into the soil, and loosen it to about the depth of your hand trowel.
- If planting in a container, ensure the drainage holes are not plugged or clogged.
- Plant the rhizomes face up (the grow-

- Water in well.
- Water sparingly after the initial watering, whether in-ground or in containers, until a few leaves have sprouted. Once several leaves are present, water more frequently to moisten the soil. Watering too often before the plant is taking up water can cause root rot.
- Calla lilies grow quickly from their rhizomes and can be expected to pop up about 2 weeks after planting. They will bloom around 2-3 months later, depending on temperature and sunlight.

## GROWING

Calla lilies are long-blooming with attractive foliage. Follow these care tips for the best results.

- Drainage is important. Don't be fooled by the fact that calla lilies like slightly moist soil and will grow in damp areas. If the soil is soggy, they will suffer.
- If you live in a climate where you must dig up your calla lilies, zone 7 or



in containers can be moved around as needed.

- Calla lilies like evenly moist soil and don't like to dry out. Mulch can help keep the soil moisture even, reduce watering needs, and keep weeds down. Apply mulch as needed to keep the area attractive and the soil from drying in the sun.



## Overwintering

- If you garden in an area that experiences more than an occasional light frost (25 degrees will usually kill a calla lily), you'll need to dig your calla lilies up and store them indoors for the winter.
- Before the first frost in fall, snip off all the leaves. Trim the stem to 1-2 inches above the ground.

bring inside, storing in a cool, warm place (60-70 degrees) for 3 days to cure.

- After curing, pack your calla rhizomes in a box or tub filled with slightly moist sawdust or pine shavings. It should be almost dry, but not quite. If you can easily tell the packing material is damp, let it dry a little before sealing the lid.
- Store the rhizomes in their box or tub in a cool, dark place, about 50 degrees. An unheated basement or your garage may work. Check them every few weeks to ensure they are not dehydrating (looking shriveled) or too damp and starting to rot.

## Types

- ‘Purple Sensation’ is a gorgeous royal purple with a light gold spadix.
- ‘Black Star’ lives up to its name, with dark, almost black blooms and green foliage lightly speckled with cream colored spots.
- ‘Morning Sun’ looks like a beautiful

- ‘Red Alert’ is firetruck red with light variegation on its leaves. This one won’t go unnoticed!
- Calla lilies are often sold in mixes, so pick a color palette that works with your existing beds or matches your patio furniture.

## HARVESTING

Calla lilies make gorgeous cut flowers and are in high demand for weddings and other bouquets.

- Don’t cut the stems to harvest calla blooms as you would other flowers. Instead, grasp at the base of the stalk and pull gently to remove the stalk and flower from the plant.
- Calla blooms will last up to 2 weeks when harvested properly!
- Although they are pretty, they are not candy. Don’t eat them. They are toxic to humans and pets.

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- Mealybugs

## WIT AND WISDOM



- Calla lilies are often purchased as potted plants around Easter and thrown out after, but they can be kept. When it's done blooming, place the calla lily in a dark, cool location without water for about 2 months. The plant will go dormant and lose its leaves.
- After this dormant period, bring it back into the light, and begin watering again, and it should sprout new leaves and bloom.
- Don't confuse calla lilies with canna lilies. Cannas, *Canna x generalis*, are much larger, growing as tall as 5 feet high. Their blooms are also different, clustering near the top of long stalks.
- Calla lilies can be propagated by dividing the rhizomes.

**FLOWERS**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Andy Wilcox**

Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer

ers, forestry, and horticulture.

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## COMMENTS

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**Wilma (not verified)** 7 months 2 weeks ago

I will be bringing my lilies inside for the winter - they are in pots outside. Even though I only had 1 flower this year, the stems have multiplied like crazy. Do I separate them now or in the spring before I bring them back outside? Also, I usually just cut them off to about 2 inches when I put them in the basement. Is that appropriate?

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**Sally Dana (not verified)** 8 months 1 week ago

I have a question my calla lilies were blooming beautiful yello flowers now they are blooming green flowers can you explain why? Thank you for your time and assistance.

**REPLY**

**Joe Bills** 8 months ago

It is natural for calla lily blooms to turn green (and eventually brown) at the end of the flowering cycle as they prepare to go dormant. But if the change is happening early- or mid-season, the most likely culprit is fertilizer. An excess of nitrogen in the soil can dull the vibrant colors and create a green hue. Our friends at the Iowa State Extension Service serve up some helpful calla lily advice:

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/mills/files/documents/10.October%202021.pdf>



**Victoria (not verified)** 10 months ago

Good information! I have a calla Lily that has grown from 2-3 stalks (?) to about a dozen over about 5 years. This year I have 4 blossoms but the are not opening fully. Mine are the creamy white with purple center, beautiful. They get full/part sun. After reading this article I realize I will need to dig them up this autum. Hope to find someone to share them with.

**REPLY**

**Emily Herbst (not verified)** 10 months ago

We've lived in our home for 3 years, outside of Syracuse, NY. We've had what we thought was a foliage plant near a variety of lilac. Yesterday I looked out our living room window and was amazed to see a spectacular yellow bloom. It's a calla lily. It has remained outside since we moved in and other than mulching, we have done nothing special to care for it. Is this unusual?

**REPLY**

**The Editors** 10 months ago

Hi Emily, it sounds to us like the former owners planted the lily outside and somehow it has survived. Last year was a very mild winter, yet it seems strange it's the first year it has bloomed. It could be that it's in a sunny enough spot and close to the house that it's defying its typical hardiness zone. We say, enjoy it while it lasts! —The Editors

**REPLY**

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**judy (not verified)** 11 months 3 weeks ago

Mine always drips at the end of the leaf. Is this normal?

**REPLY**

**Connie (not verified)** 5 days 9 hours ago

I would like to know about that also. I

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[REPLY](#)

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**Mary (not verified)** 1 year ago

My calla lilly blooms will not stand up. What am I doing wrong?

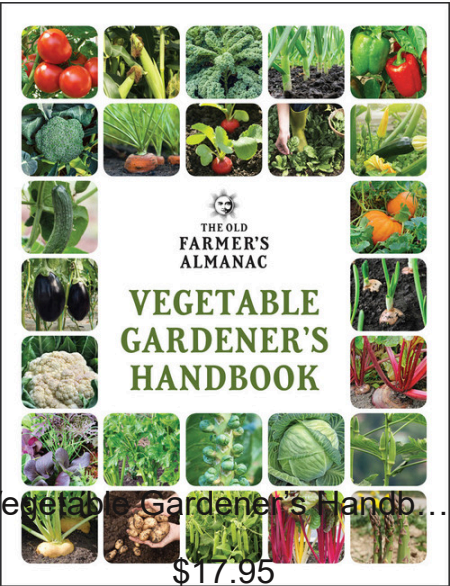
[REPLY](#)

**Pat (not verified)** 10 months 1 week ago

My calla Lilly won't bloom

[REPLY](#)[MORE COMMENTS](#)

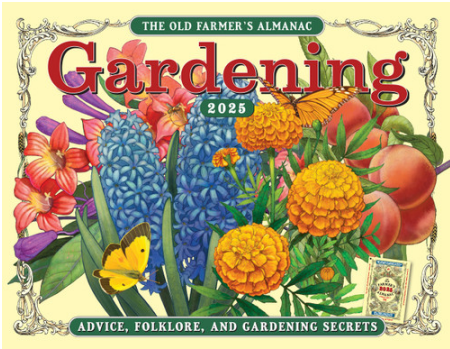
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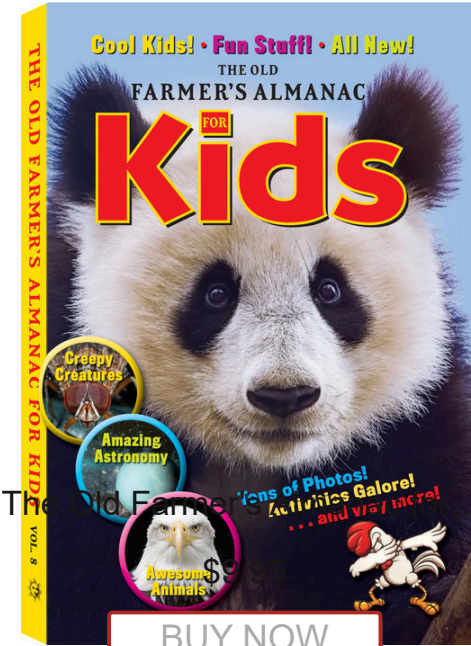
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