

CANNA CULTIVATION

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Canna can be grown from rhizomes or purchased plants, and some varieties can be grown from seeds. In each case, canna cultivation started in the early part of the year will provide flowering plants from July to October.

Growing from rhizomes

For early flowers, canna rhizomes need to be planted in a greenhouse (or conservatory) in March/April. They will then be ready for moving outdoors in late May. We suggest planting one rhizome per 2 litre pot, or 3 rhizomes in a 5 Litre pot. They are planted near the surface with any shoots showing through. Ordinary potting compost can be used at this stage.

Hint 1: Take great care where you purchase rhizomes to avoid virus disease. Only get rhizomes from a trusted source.

Hint 2: Not all dormant canna rhizomes will grow, no matter how good they look. This is simply in the nature of cannas. If you get 80% you are doing well.

Hint 3: Canna rhizomes will shrivel and die if left un-planted. They should therefore be planted immediately they are received, or stored under damp compost until required.

Hint 4: Do not be tempted to plant canna rhizomes directly outside in the ground. Well-established plants may survive cold/frost, but newly planted rhizomes may well be lost, and in any case will be late flowering. Grow rhizomes indoors to give them a good start.

Growing from seeds

Only a few varieties can be grown from seeds. The rest are either sterile and don't produce seeds, or if they do they don't come true. Canna seeds are very hard and need scarifying before being sown, otherwise they will be very slow to germinate. Some commercial seed is provided already scarified. See our online information on growing cannas from seeds.

Growing canna plants

Canna plants should be hardened-off and planted outdoors when the danger of frost has passed. They can be planted in herbaceous beds and borders, or they can be grown outdoors in pots or tubs, or they can even be grown indoors as conservatory plants. They have no particular preference for acid/alkaline and will grow in sandy soils and in clay soils, chalky soils, even wet, boggy soils, but the soil must be rich. They can withstand dry soils and drought. In dry conditions they will still flower, but just remain smaller. We prefer to plant them in groups of at least 3 of the same variety. Typically, plants in a clump should be separated by about 20cm (9"), and adjacent clumps about 50cm (18"). Tall varieties need at least a 10 litre pot for 1 plant. Short varieties are happy spending the year in a 5 litre pot.

Hint 1: The secret of successful canna growing is that the soil/compost needs to be very rich. If grown in the ground then the ground needs to be well dug and manured and/or fertiliser added as though growing vegetables. If grown in pots then good quality potting compost should be used, and enriched with extra fertiliser or manure. If cannas do not flower, the reason is usually that the soil/compost is too poor.

Hint 2: Cannas can be grown throughout the British Isles, and some of

our customers have successfully grown them north of the Arctic Circle! However, they will give of their best in a warm and sultry position.

Hint 3: Although cannas love the full sun, it actually causes the flowers of some varieties to lose its vibrancy, and the foliage of the dark leaved varieties to fade. We therefore suggest a little dappled shade.

Hint 4: Cannas are very robust plants and do not need staking. However, the leaves can be damaged/torn by high winds, and for that reason we suggest growing them in a reasonably sheltered position.

Hint 5: Take great care with dead heading. This is because a new flower spike arises from the midst of a dead flower truss, and by dead-heading you may be cutting off the rest of that year's flowers. If you must dead-head, then take care to protect the sheath that contains the next flower spike.

Winter Storage

At the end of the season (we usually wait until they have been cut down by the first hard frost), dig out the clump, cut off the foliage, and store the rhizomes in a frost-free place. Losses are reduced if the rhizomes are stored under slightly damp conditions, and this is best achieved by not dividing the rhizomes at the time they are dug, but storing the whole clump of rhizomes with the soil still attached. Cannas grown in pots should be taken indoors, but remain in their pots through the winter and be divided and re-potted the following spring.

Diseases and pests

Cannas are not much troubled by garden pests, but slugs and snails should be discouraged because part of the beauty of cannas is the foliage, and even a little damage is evident, and lasts all year. Red Spider Mite is a pest of many plants grown in conservatories and glasshouses, and cannas are no exception. Pesticides that contain bifenthrin or albamectrin are effective, as are some pesticides that are based on soaps, eg Majestik. The big scourge of cannas in recent years has been canna virus disease. This rarely kills the plant, but results in distorted and streaked foliage. There is no cure and diseased plants should be destroyed. See our on-line information on canna virus disease www.virus-disease.co.uk.