



*Exotic
Tropical
Plants*

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Caladium 'Fire Chief'

Description

Caladiums are tropical plants grown for their beautiful foliage. They grow from an underground corm (like a bulb) and multiply easily. The heart shaped leaves are beautifully coloured and patterned, and may vary from 15 to 60 cm in length. The leaves provide a striking contrast with the green foliage of other plants, especially when planted in the foreground.

I believe this particular cultivar is 'Fire Chief', although I did not obtain it as a named cultivar. It is a medium to large growing caladium, growing from about 30cm to about 50cm high. The fully grown leaves are about 20cm long. The leaves start out with quite a bit of green, developing dark pink to red spots. The pink/red spots gradually spread as the leaf ages. Sometimes the colour turns a lighter pink, other times it is more red. The amount of pink/red colour in each leaf varies, with some having the entire leaf pink/red, while other leaves have a green border.

It grows to around 50 cm high, and clumps and multiplies very readily. Your small plant will turn into a big one very quickly.

Cultivation

Caladiums can be grown in pots, as specimens, or massed in beds or borders to provide summer colour in shady locations.

Several varieties change colour (or become more colourful) as they grow – please be patient if your small leaves are not yet their final colour.

Location: In tropical and subtropical areas they can be grown in a sheltered spot in the garden. In cooler areas they are suitable for indoors or a glasshouse.

Temperature: Caladiums like warmth and humidity, with a minimum summer temperature of 23 degrees and a minimum winter temperature of 12 degrees.

Sun: Caladiums need protection from full sun for best growth and colour. Some varieties will tolerate full sun for a couple of hours daily, but all prefer dappled or moderate shade.

If bulbs are planted in deep shade, the green colour of the caladium will tend to dominate.

Planting: They require a warm, moist soil to grow. Planting in cool soil results in slow growth or tuber rot.

Plant the tuber about 2-3cm under the soil. Water frequently and thoroughly, keeping the soil evenly moist to touch but not saturated. Do not let caladiums sit in water if planted in a container.

Watering: Although caladiums enjoy warm weather, they don't tolerate dry conditions. In beds and borders, water plants weekly during dry weather. To help conserve soil moisture, apply a 5cm layer of mulch around the plants. Caladiums in containers should be checked regularly and watered when the potting soil begins to dry out.

Fertilizing: Fertilize caladiums regularly with a soluble fertilizer to promote strong foliage growth.

Frost: They are frost sensitive. They are generally dormant in winter.



Transplanting: Caladium leaves are normally held fairly vertically above the plant. I find that when caladiums are transplanted, the existing leaves will often 'flop' and will not be held upright. Don't be worried by this – the caladium will soon grow new leaves, and the new leaves will grow just how they are meant to! Once the caladium has some new leaves, you may want to chop off any 'floppy' ones.