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Plants*

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### Caladium 'Harlequin'

#### 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.

This particular cultivar has no name that I can find, so I have named it 'Harlequin'. It is truly gorgeous - leaves are predominantly a deep blood red, with splashes of green and white variegation. Leaves may be completely red, or speckled with colour. It is a medium-small growing caladium, getting to about 20-30cm high. The fully grown leaves are about 20cm long.

#### 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.

**A note on 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.**

**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.

