

SPRING BULBS

FOR SUMMER COLOUR

HUMBER NURSERIES "GREEN THUMB GUIDE"



BEGONIAS, CALADIUMS, CALLAS, CANNAS, DAHLIAS, TARO



For anyone who can garden only on a balcony, porch or deck and only in planters, then spring planted bulbs, corms, and tubers are ideal plants. Annual plants must be purchased each year – perennial plants are not likely to survive winter in an above ground container – but these tender perennials will last for many years when lifted from the soil and stored indoors.

Oriental and Asiatic Lilies are hardy in the garden, but should be lifted and stored dry indoors when grown in containers.

Water gardening is another area where plants are almost exclusively grown in containers. Canna Lilies and Taro are spectacular plants that grow from tubers and may be saved from year to year.

Whether you grow such plants in the garden proper or in containers, it is the ease of overwintering them that has unique appeal. The soil that they grow in is left outdoors and the bulbs or tubers are kept indoors (in moist peat moss or vermiculite). These are both sterile products that cannot harbour insects or other pests. As a further precaution, the plants should be dusted with an insecticide or fungicide and kept in a cool, dry spot that does not freeze.

The financial benefit of saving bulbs and tubers is obvious, as they are far too valuable to be discarded. The steps involved are simple and no special equipment is needed. You not only save money but you earn satisfaction from completion of a worthwhile task.

Begonias, Caladiums, Dahlias and all other spring planted tubers and bulbs are available in March at Humber Nurseries and at our booth at Canada Blooms. This is the time to buy them or you may miss out. You might also wish to get some of them started indoors and ready to go out when weather permits.

BEGONIAS

Begonias take 12 weeks or more to flower, so they should be started in March or early April. Plant the tuber concave side up (not more than 5 cm deep). The soil should only just cover the tuber. Use an 8 or 10 cm pot, or plant a number of them in an open seedling flat (space them 8 cm apart). A soil-less mix such as Pro-Mix is preferred over potting soil, and it should be moist but not soaking wet. Soil temperature at night should be about 12°C and 21°C in the day and they will need a sunny window (or be under lights). If intended for window box or planter they should be started in a smaller container first. They can only go outdoors after the risk of frost is passed. Begonias do best in part shade – a spot getting morning sun is ideal.



SAVING AND STORING THE BEGONIA TUBERS

When the first fall frosts are expected, stop watering the plants. After a light frost, lift the plants, with any soil clinging to them, wrap them loosely in newspaper, and let them dry for a week or more. Cut the tops back to about 10 cm and continue drying. When the remaining stubs of stem fall off with a touch, shake the tubers free of any soil and store them in dry peat moss or dry vermiculite. The ideal winter temperature is 15°C, but never lower than 5°C.



CALADIUMS

Caladiums are fancy-leaf plants that grow from a tuber. Their foliage usually has mixtures of white, green or red. Plant in Pro-Mix in a small container, and place the tuber with the knobby side up (1 to 3 cm deep). Keep them moist and warm - at least 22°C. They can go outdoors by the middle of June, and do best in filtered shade and out of the wind. In fall, dry out the plants by withholding water and store in a warm dry place until spring. Fertilize in the growing season with 5-1-1 Fish Emulsion.

CALLA LILIES – *Zantedeschia*

These are arum lilies with a large coloured spathe wrapped around a central spadix. White, yellow and pink flowered forms are available. In some types the broad green leaves are splashed with silver. Callas are subtropical and can only go outdoors when frost is no longer a threat. Start the rhizomes indoors in March or early April. Plant 10 cm deep in a rich potting soil – water thoroughly at first, then only sparingly until the first shoots begin to show. The growing plants must always be well watered and never dry out. Fertilize every two weeks with water soluble 20-20-20. Callas have become popular as water plants or bog plants. In this case, use Aquatic Plant Soil and fertilize with pond fertilizer tablets.



SAVING THE CALLA RHIZOMES

After flowering has finished, withhold water (or remove from the pond) to induce dormancy. Cool fall weather will do the same. When the leaves turn yellow and die down, the tuber can be lifted from the soil. Gently wash the soil away with tepid water, and try not to damage the rhizome. Dry the rhizome in a warm spot for a week, apply an insecticide/fungicide dust –before storing each rhizome in its own paper bag and keep in a cool dark spot.

CANNA LILIES



If your Canna Lilies are to flower before summer is over, they must be started indoors in March or early April. Plant the rhizome flat in a rich potting soil, no more than 5 cm deep. Water thoroughly and place them in a warm spot with good light. They can be planted in the garden when there is no longer any danger of frost. Cannas need to be dependably moist and should be fertilized every two weeks with water soluble 20-20-20.

The choices of Cannas today go beyond green or red leaved forms with either red or yellow flowers. Many new varieties have bronze or copper leaves, some with contrasting stripes and flower colours include orange and pink. Cannas can be grown in shallow water and have been enthusiastically adopted as a pond plant. As a water plant they should be potted in Aquatic soil and fertilized with pond fertilizer tablets.

Cannas have a number of flowers on each stem. Remove the topmost flower as it fades and after all the flowers have been spent, cut the stem to the next side shoot. Three or four secondary flowering shoots can be produced over the course of the summer, although the later flowers might not be as large.

SAVING AND STORING CANNA LILIES

After the first frost has blackened the tips or the foliage has started to wither, cut back the stems to about 15 cm. Lift the tubers from the soil and leave in the sun to dry. DO NOT wash the rhizome and dust with an insecticide or fungicide. Store in moist peat moss or moist vermiculite in a cool dark spot. The medium should never dry out and may need to be moistened occasionally through the winter, but do not let it get too wet or the rhizomes may rot.

DAHLIAS

It is usually only the 30 – 40 cm tall seed grown dahlias that are offered as growing plants. If you prefer the taller flowered types, you must grow them yourself from tuberous roots.

A wide range of types are possible in a range of heights from 60 to 180 cm and flower sizes from a couple of inches wide to some as large as dinner plates.

They need full sun, deeply cultivated rich soil, and dependable moisture. Flowering takes 8 to 12 weeks so you may want to start them indoors and put them out in June when the soil is warm.

You can also delay their planting until mid to late June so that they will flower through September and into the fall.

SAVING AND STORING DAHLIA TUBERS

Leave the plants in the garden as long as you can so that they can store up moisture and nutrients. After the first frost, cut back the tops to about 10 cm. Use a garden fork to dig up the tubers. Turn the clump upside down so water does not collect in the hollow stems, and let dry in the sun for the day. Most of the soil will fall away, but some of it will cling. DO NOT wash the tubers.

Store the clump in an open container with a mixture of moist peat moss and vermiculite. Keep them in a cool, dark space and check on them during the winter as they may need to be misted. In late winter/early spring the mix can be moistened to encourage new growth. The tubers can then be separated and each potted in rich potting soil in 15 cm pots. Provide heat and light – your new plants will be ready for the garden by early June.



GLADIOLUS



Superb as cut flowers and effective in a border. The blooms start to open from the bottom of the spike upwards, and a full two weeks of continuous colour can be obtained from one plant alone.

Planting can begin as soon as tree leaves unfold in the garden. Continuous bloom can be achieved from mid-summer until fall by planting at two week intervals up to mid-June, or by planting a mix of cultivars that bloom at different times.

STORING GLADIOLUS CORMS

After the Gladiolus has finished flowering, cut the stem where it emerges from the leaves. Allow the leaves to remain in place and continue feeding the plant to improve the blooms next year. The corms will be ready to dig six to eight weeks after flowering.

After digging, cut the tops off close to the corm and spread the corms out in the sun to dry for a day. The corm you dig will be a brand new corm that the plant has made this year (the old corm will be small and attached to the bottom). There may also be many small cormels that can be saved but will take three years of growth to reach flowering size. Keep the corms in open boxes for three weeks in a well-ventilated, warm place. By then, the old corms and stems will separate easily from the new ones. Store for winter in open, well-ventilated containers in a cool place (but no lower than 5°C).

TARO – *Colocasia*

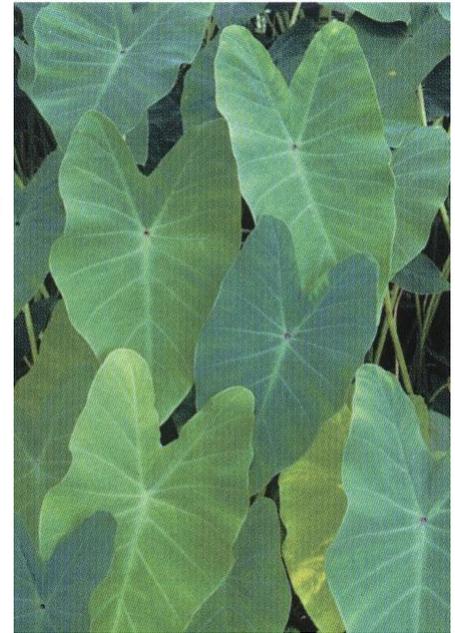
Taro is also known as Elephant Ears, although there are a number of plants with the same nickname.

Taro are exotic plants with very large leaves that can be green, dark reddish green, or almost black. They need constant moisture and make outstanding pond plants. They can grow quite large, so place them in an open spot in your garden or in a large container.

OVERWINTERING OF TARO

The plants can be reduced in size by cutting off the largest leaves (look for the spot where juvenile leaves come out the side of the stem). Place the container on a saucer so that the plant can be kept moist and grow near a window. You may also cut back completely and store in a cold room that does not freeze.

You can also remove the roots entirely from the soil and store them in a container of moist vermiculite and peat moss.



LILY OF THE NILE – *Agapanthus*

An elegant plant with large clusters of blue or white flowers atop strong, leafless stems emerging from a clump of strap-shaped dark green leaves. The flowers grow on 100 cm stems and do not need staking. The rhizome should be planted just below the surface of your garden bed. Fertilize every two weeks with water-soluble 20-20-20 to keep them flowering all summer.

OVERWINTER AGAPANTHUS

When Lily of the Nile are grown in containers, as they usually are, you need only bring the plants indoors in the fall. Keep them growing as you would a houseplant, or cut them right back and store in a cool spot that does not freeze.

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