Cannas

Fact Sheet FS1155

Cooperative Extension

Edith Wallace, Ph.D., Master Gardener, Passaic County
Elaine Fogerty Barbour, Passaic County Agricultural Assistant

Cannas are quick growing, vigorous tropical ornamental plants with heavy foliage and large flowers of striking colors. Cannas are grown from rhizomes (underground stems) that have buds and fibrous roots. They are used most effectively as bedding plants but their vigor and size (4-7′) make them less desirable for planting in space-restricted areas. Dwarf varieties of cannas (1-3′) are available. They can also be grown as container plants.

Full sun is ideal for cannas. They require a well drained but moisture retentive soil enriched with composted manure or humus, plus fertilizers as recommended by a soil test. A 5-10-5 or 5-10-10 ratio is generally recommended for growing Cannas. If needed, fertilize biweekly throughout the summer to support their vigorous growth.

Canna rhizomes can be purchased readily. They are sold a variety of names so that one can choose kinds of various heights and flower colors varying from white through yellow to bright scarlet. Cannas can be purchased in the spring either as dormant rhizomes or as growing plants in 3″ or 4″ pots.

Canna rhizomes or plants should be planted after all danger of frost is past, usually after May 15. If you have grown cannas in the past, a portion of an old plant containing several strong buds can be replanted. Use a sharp clean knife to cut the rhizome. If the buds (eyes) are scarce, the old rhizomes may be divided to single eyes, but single eyes are likely to make weak plants. If very strong clumps are wanted, a whole rhizome may be used. If separated to single eyes they are best started in pots about 4 weeks before the last frost date.

For mass effect, the rhizomes of medium-sized varieties should be planted 1′ apart each way. The very large cultivars may be planted farther apart, but the smaller kinds should be closer together. In dry weather a thorough soaking of the plants once a week will insure stronger growth.

The blooms should be picked as soon as withered. Because cannas are not winter hardy, dig cannas, after a hard frost. Be careful not to damage or break the rhizomes. Cut the top back to 6″. Dry them in the sun for a few days. Store in bags or boxes of barely moist vermiculite, perlite or peat moss.

Check during the winter to make sure the rhizomes do not completely dry up, only a few drops of water may be needed. Too much water will cause them to rot. An attached garage or basement where winter temperatures are cool but not below freezing is best.

Snails, slugs and Japanese beetles are the pests most frequently seen on cannas. Japanese beetles may be handpicked or treated with an appropriate pesticide. To reduce the slug and snail population keep the area free of weeds (see FS397 Slugs and Snails in the Vegetable Garden). To avoid problems with blights or wilts, water early in the day and try to keep the leaves dry. Cut out infected areas, sterilizing pruners with rubbing alcohol or in a 10% household bleach solution. Be sure to rinse the tools thoroughly after bleaching. Do not over winter rhizomes from infected plants.

© 2011 Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. All rights reserved.

For a comprehensive list of our publications visit www.njaes.rutgers.edu

February 2011

Cooperating Agencies: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and County Boards of Chosen Freeholders. Rutgers Cooperative Extension, a unit of the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, is an equal opportunity program provider and employer.

RUTGERS
New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
88 Lipman Drive, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8525
Phone: 732.932.5000