

Cannas for Home Landscapes

Cannas (*Canna × generalis*) are bold, exotic-looking plants grown for their attractive flowers and foliage. Flower colors include yellow, orange, pink, and red. The large, banana-like foliage may be green, bronze-burgundy, or variegated in a striped or marbled pattern.

Most canna varieties (cultivars) grow to a height of 3 to 5 feet, but a few “giants” may reach 8 to 10 feet. Tall cultivars can be used as temporary screens or background plantings. Smaller “dwarf” cultivars that grow only 1½ to 2 feet tall are suitable for containers.



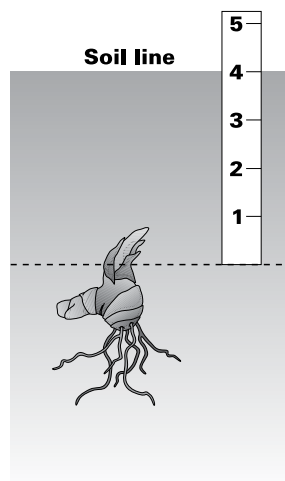
Culture

Cannas perform best in moist, well-drained soils in full sun. Water once a week during dry weather. To promote growth, fertilize once or twice during the growing season with a balanced garden fertilizer such as 10-10-10. Remove spent flowers to promote additional blooming. Viruses are the most serious pest of cannas.



Planting

Cannas are usually grown from rhizomes that are started indoors in large pots in March or planted directly outdoors after the danger of frost is past (mid-May in central Iowa). Rhizomes should be planted 4 to 5 inches deep.



Starting from seeds

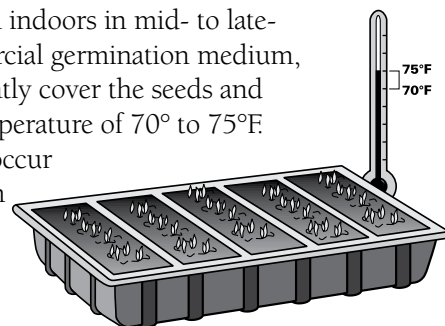
The most popular seed-grown cannas are from the Tropical Series and include ‘Tropical Rose’ (All-America Selection in 1992), ‘Tropical Red’, ‘Tropical Salmon’, ‘Tropical Bronze Scarlet’, ‘Tropical White’, and ‘Tropical Yellow’. Cultivars in the Tropical Series grow 2 to 3 feet tall.

Seeds should be sown indoors in mid- to late-February in a commercial germination medium, such as Jiffy Mix. Lightly cover the seeds and water. Maintain a temperature of 70° to 75°F.

Germination should occur

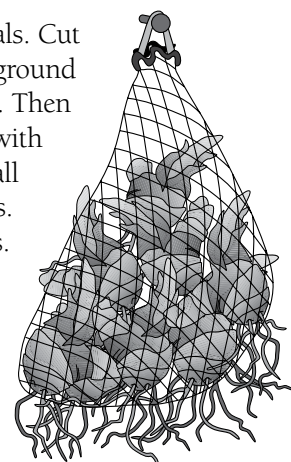
in 7 to 14 days. When seedlings are large enough to handle, transplant them into individual pots. Plant

outdoors after the danger of frost is past. Plants should flower 90 to 120 days after the seeds were sown.



Storage

In Iowa, cannas are tender perennials. Cut plants back to 4 to 6 inches above ground a few days after a hard, killing frost. Then carefully dig up the canna clumps with a spade or garden fork. Leave a small amount of soil around the rhizomes. Allow them to dry for several hours. Store in large boxes, wire crates, or mesh bags in a cool (40° to 50°F), dry location. Large clumps can be divided in spring before planting. Each section should have at least 3 to 5 buds.



Viruses of cannas

Several viruses, such as canna yellow mottle virus and bean yellow mosaic virus, have become serious diseases of cannas in the last several years. Possible symptoms include mottling or streaking of foliage, stunting of plants, and poor flowering.

Virus-infected cannas cannot be cured. Plants that exhibit virus-type symptoms should be dug up and destroyed.

Because of virus problems, many mail-order nurseries have reduced their canna offerings. Home gardeners should purchase cannas only from reputable nurseries that sell virus-free plant material.

Cultivars

A large number of attractive cultivars are available. A few suggestions are provided.

Green foliage

'Aida' - soft pink flowers, 3 to 3½ feet, dark green leaves

'City of Portland' - coral-pink blossoms, 3½ to 4 feet, green leaves

'Crimson Beauty' - rose-red flowers, 3 to 4 feet, green leaves

'Lucifer' - red flowers with yellow borders, 2 feet, green leaves

'Miss Oklahoma' - watermelon pink blossoms, 3 feet, green foliage

'Musifolia' - small red flowers, 10 to 12 feet, large green leaves edged with red

'Richard Wallace' - golden yellow flowers, 4 feet, green leaves

'Rosemond Cole' - orange-red flowers with yellow edges, 3 feet, dark green foliage

'The President' - scarlet blossoms, 3 to 3½ feet, green leaves

Burgundy/bronze foliage

'Black Knight' - crimson red flowers, 3 to 3½ feet, burgundy leaves

'Red Futurity' - dark red flowers, 3 to 3½ feet, burgundy foliage

'Wyoming' - orange flowers, 3 to 4 feet, bronze-red foliage



Variegated foliage

'Cleopatra' - yellow flowers with red spots, 3 to 4 feet, dark green foliage with bronze-red markings

'Inferno' - orange-red flowers, 3 to 4 feet, foliage striped with green, yellow, orange, and pink

'Intrigue' - light salmon flowers, 8 to 10 feet, burgundy and green leaves

'Pretoria' (**'Bengal Tiger'**) - orange flowers, 4 to 6 feet, yellow and green striped foliage

'Striped Beauty' - yellow flowers with white markings, 3 feet, green foliage with creamy yellow stripes

'Stuttgart' - orange flowers, 3 to 4 feet, green and white variegated foliage

For more information

On selection, planting, cultural practices, and environmental quality—contact your local Iowa State University Extension office visit these websites—

<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/>

www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu

www.reimangardens.iastate.edu

Call ISU's Hortline at 515-294-3108 (Monday- Friday, 10 a.m.-noon and 1-4:30 p.m.).

If you want to learn more about horticulture through training and volunteer work, ask your ISU Extension office for information about the Iowa Master Gardener program.

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