

Producing Caladium Plants from Leaves

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My wife has several very attractive Caladium plants which gave me the thought of possibly multiplying them by leaf cuttings. These colorful plants are a perennial and has colorful, heart shaped leaves. It is a native of Central and South America, but feels right at home in our northern borders. Since their hardiness, only extends to zones 9 to 10, in Delaware they are usually grown as a house plant, which is not a problem as they are readily grown in containers.

I remember when I was growing up it seemed like every family had at least one plant in their home, and rightfully so since the plant has been around since the 1700's. The leaves of this plant usually have distinct colored midribs, mixed with contrasting margins. Various patterns found within the leaves include mottled, striped, and veined. It comes in various shades of green, pink, red, rose, and white. This

plant has no defined stems as the leaves originate on the long petioles which grow directly from the underground tuber.

I am always attracted to these beauties when shopping for flowers and plants so it was only natural that sooner or later, I would attempt to grow some from leaf cuttings. Caladiums generally grow from a tuberous corm, or bulbs. When you purchase them in the garden supply stores you usually buy a package of bulbs. If you are planning to place your bulbs outdoors start them about 6 weeks before the last frost, however, in my case they will remain indoors anyway, so I can start my leaf cuttings at any time of the year.

These plants hate cool temperatures so be sure that the soil temperature reaches 70 degrees F. When placing them outside for the summertime do not put them in full sun, they prefer partial shade. Always keep the soil moist but not soaked. During the summertime apply plenty of fertilizer or plant food to these little beauties. When fertilizing, use a low-nitrogen formulation, since excessive nitrogen tends to affect the color of the leaves. As a houseplant, the Caladium will enter a dormancy period as the leaves start to die back. When this start you should stop watering the plant and allow it to rest. Resume watering when new growth begins to appear. Without further ado, let's get involved with growing Caladiums from leaves.

My wife has several different variations and colors of caladiums so hopefully, I can increase her collection. Incidentally, this trick should prove valuable in the event you accidentally break off a leaf during your normal maintenance and care of this houseplant. Let's face it, you can be ever so careful when moving your plant from one location to another in your home, but a small leaf will often break off the mother plant. So, here you have such a beautiful leaf why throw it in the trash when you can root it? Below is a little know secret concerning these adorable plants.

Since a Caladium leaf grows on a petiole which connects to the tuber below ground, it is a simple process to take those leaves and generate a new plant. In order to survive the leaf must be capable of absorbing enough water so it does not wilt. Once its roots and begins to grow it will produce new leaves and the process of photosynthesis will take over produced sugars for growth. When rooting takes place, the leaf to the root can be transplanted into a pot with soil.

It is amazing what plants can grow in a bit of water. Small vases, water containers or even milk bottles are the perfect container to root these plants in. Your cutting should be about 5 inches long. Use a sharp knife and cut just below where the leaf is attached to the stem or at a node. Place the leaf cutting into a clean bottle, in our case a Starbucks empty Frappuccino bottle, with fresh water. Select the smallest container that is feasible as the cutting will release hormones into the water which aid in rooting. Change the water every couple of days in order to minimize possible bacterial growth. If additional leaves are present, remove all but the top leaf.

You should notice some rooting starting to take place within three to four weeks. Place the container of cuttings in a bright and warm location. If a particular stem looks like it is starting to rot, remove it before it contaminates the rest of the cuttings. When the roots are about 2 inches long the plant is ready to be transplanted into a pot. To pot the plant premoisten a flower pot containing compost. Ensure that the pot has sufficient drainage and keep it moist but not soaked.

