GROWERTALKS

Culture Notes

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Ideal Companions

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If you're looking for recipes that really stand out on retail benches, caladiums are the perfect element to add to your mixes. These versatile foliage plants not only offer a variety of colors and textures to containers, they're also easy to grow if you follow a few guidelines.

At Four Star Greenhouse in Carleton, Michigan, Senior Manager of Growing Operations Dan Foster is producing a wide variety of caladium combos with other tropical elements like crotons, sansevieria and cordylines, as well as partial sun and shade options like begonias. He's found that caladiums will even pair well with a Supertunia Petunia or two.

"You just don't want to marry it up with all Supertunia Vista Bubblegum because it will get choked out," Foster said. "But that doesn't mean you can't stick a Bubblegum off to the side. Caladiums just aren't super aggressive so they're not going to get bigger and bigger and put more leaves out all summer. They pretty much flush and give you what they're going to give you. So, you want to pair them up with other plants that aren't going to get super big, as they'll get choked out over time."

Pictured clockwise from top: New in garden centers this year, Good Hearted features Lemon Coral Sedum, Heart to Heart Lemon Blush Caladium and ColorBlaze Cherry Drop Coleus. • Heart to Heart Snow Flurry Caladium, Heart to Heart Scarlet Flame Caladium, Surefire Rose Begonia and Diamond Snow Euphorbia. • Heart to Heart Scarlet Flame Caladium, Heart to Heart Bold 'N Beautiful Caladium and Surefire White Begonia.

Production pointers

When creating combinations that include caladiums, it's important to note that they'll need a head start.

"We don't plant the bulb at the same time as the other component plugs," said Dan. Instead, Four Star growers plant caladiums in a quart container for four to six weeks before creating a 12- to 14-in. container.

"They love the warmth, so giving them a head start in a quart and growing them in a warm location gives them an

opportunity to compete and not get overgrown by the other component plants later on," Dan explained.

Caladiums don't require much in the way of fungicides, pinching or plant growth regulators, but they do require a lot of heat, so it's important to monitor both air and soil temperatures.

"They're pretty easy," said Dan. "Once you get them planted, if you grow them at 75 to 85 degrees for the first four to six weeks, you really can't go wrong."

Once they hit the four- to six-week mark, growers plant that quart-sized caladium in an upright container along with plugs for the other elements. Six to seven weeks later, the container is ready for sale.

Timing tips

Four Star Greenhouse sells the majority of its caladium combinations between Mother's Day and Memorial Day (like most combos), but there's also an opportunity for holiday sales by combining red and green caladiums with white elements like Diamond Frost Euphorbia or Surefire White Begonia.

The ideal time to ship to retailers is Weeks 18 through 24 since Michigan nights are still getting down to 30 or 40 degrees in Weeks 14 to 17. It's important to note that caladiums shouldn't be exposed to temperatures below 65 degrees.

"You don't want to plan them for early spring sales, as they can be cold-sensitive," said Dan. **GT**

> **Caladium Cultural Info**
> 1) If you start to see bleaching on the leaves or they start to appear transparent, they're getting too much sun.
> 2) Treat with a broad-spectrum fungicide at transplant.
> 3) Optimum temperature for sprouting tubers is above 75F (23C).
> 4) Keep temperature (soil and air) above 65F (18C) to grow and finish. Temperatures below 60F (15C) will cause stunting.
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> For more cultural information, visit bit.ly/CaladiumCulturalInfo.