

CANNAS CAN BE CANDIDATES FOR COLOR

By Ralph E. Mitchell

This past weekend I was looking at my somewhat sad cannas patch and decided to do some work on them. I dug the overgrown cannas bed and divided, cleaned up, and replanted each division in compost-enriched soil. It was about time I did this annual chore in an attempt to renovate the site and rejuvenate the plants. Also, through the propagation technique known as division, I was able to propagate a single clump into multiple new plants. These tropical and subtropical perennials look great and, growing from a short end of just under two feet to over six feet tall, cannas can make a great versatile and sustainable impact in your yard.

Cannas are often used in borders or mass planted in round or square beds for a formal look. Cannas will benefit from rich soil so consider adding several inches of well-rotted manure as you prepare the soil before planting. Select a site that is full sun for best growth; some partial shade can be tolerated however. Cannas generally come as bare-root rhizomes or potted plants that are planted one to two feet apart depending on the ultimate size of the specific cultivar. Start fertilizing cannas in the spring and then monthly as they grow throughout the summer with a 12-4-8 or its equivalent as per label instructions. This supplemental feeding, plus adequate water, will help guarantee optimum blooming. Careful removal of the spent flowers will help promote subsequent flowering throughout the season.

Also consider growing cannas in pots. Four to five gallon plastic pots filled with rich soil makes an ideal setting for cannas. Generally, less fertilizer and water is used, and exposure to soil-dwelling insects and nematodes is greatly reduced. Potted cannas can be placed wherever you need them to brighten up a dull spot. They can actually be buried up to their rims to blend in with the landscape.

Besides dividing rhizomes, you can also grow cannas from seed. As cannas seeds have a tough seed coat, soaking them in warm water

for 24 hours helps speed and increase germination. If the seeds are started early enough, you can actually get flowering sized plants this summer.

Cannas beds quickly get overcrowded and will need rejuvenation each year. Rejuvenation will allow for a clean-up of the bed and resetting of the best rhizomes. Dig up the clumps and clean out the old rhizomes giving special attention to look for vigorous rhizomes which contain viable eyes (sprouts). Clean the selected rhizomes and replant in the landscape or pots at once.

Would you be intrigued with cannas named 'King Midas' or 'Porcelain Rose'? How about 'Red King Hubert' or 'Madame Butterfly'? These are cultivars of cannas that are well adapted to our hot Florida climate. They not only have large flowers, some actually have colorful foliage. For the last two years, I have grown one called 'Wyoming' which has orange flowers and bronze foliage. It is a large plant that looked nice in my front yard landscape. As mentioned earlier, their perennial nature also allows colorful foliage, ranging from green to greenish blue and from purplish to white striped, to be part of the landscape. Add

flowers that come in ivory, yellow, rose, salmon, crimson and red and you have a plant that will improve the looks of any yard. Selecting which cannas varieties to grow is a wide open task. Keep in mind that there are two different kinds of flower types. Flowers arranged close together are called gladiolus flowering cannas. Loosely arranged, with narrow petals, the other type of cannas is classified as orchid flowering. Cannas are further classified into groups in consideration of their heights. Very tall growing cannas are sometimes called giant cannas. They are four feet tall and were first introduced in the 1950's. Cultivars such as 'Aida', 'La Boheme' and 'Madame Butterfly' fit into this category and are named after operas. The next group is labeled as low growing which grows to

about 36 inches tall. Good for gardens or containers, 'Rosen Kavalier', 'Shell Pink', and 'Tiger Lily' are several representatives of this cannas type. The tiniest types of cannas are called dwarfs. This group of cannas will grow to only about 18 inches tall. These cultivars are named appropriately including 'Doc', 'Grumpy' and 'Happy'.

Cannas rhizomes are available in most garden centers around our county right now. Through the year, some garden centers may also have containerized plants available with full grown plants in bloom. Seeds may have to be obtained through mail-order catalogs or through the Internet.

For more information on all types of gardening questions, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our **Plant Clinics** are available across the county:

- **Demonstration Garden (6900 Florida Street, PG)** Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.
- **South Gulf Cove Learning Garden** 3rd Wednesday of month 9:00am-12:00pm.

Monthly **Plant Clinics** are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Peachland Promenades Publix** 2nd Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** 3rd Saturday of month.
- **Lowe's Garden Center Murdock** 4th Saturday of month.

Ralph Mitchell is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service. You may contact him by email (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com). You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

Resource:

Tjia, B. & Black, R.J. (2003) Cannas for the Florida Landscape. University of Florida/IFAS Extension Service.