

## **Overwintering Caladiums and Elephant Ears**

Gardeners tend to plant Caladiums and Elephant Ears for some of the same reasons. Both are perennials that add texture and drama to beds and other plantings, and they add a showy dimension, chiefly because of their foliage. Both are attractive when planted alone as well. Caladiums can be used in flower arrangements and can do well in shady areas though they flourish in filtered bright light.

**Caladiums** can be used multiple seasons, but the tubers may be smaller in subsequent years. To avoid a decrease in size many gardeners prefer to buy new tubers each year. However, there are gardeners who overwinter the plants. For this purpose, start by cutting off the foliage as soon as possible is recommended. Then, there are a few more steps to this process. Soil and excess leaf debris should be removed. For best results, the tubers can then be dried in a well ventilated and shady area. After about a week, the tubers can be packed in a medium that will keep them dry and allow for ventilation. There are several mediums that can be used, including dry peat moss, vermiculite, or perlite. When packing them for storage make sure that the tubers do not touch each other so that there is less danger of fungus. It is also a good idea to dust the tubers with a fungicide. Store them in a place such as an attached garage or sunroom where the temperature will not go below 50 degrees.

On the other hand, some gardeners opt to do very little preparation. They leave the caladiums where they are, adding a covering of extra mulch that will protect the tubers from low temperatures. This method works well in mild winters. Bottom line - if the soil around the caladium tubers falls below 40 degrees, it is likely that they will not survive.

**Elephant Ears** are valued for their size. Several varieties grow to be huge. Generally, gardeners take advantage of their habit of spreading. Older leaves come back even bigger than the year before while the new shoots start much smaller than the old growth and become larger over the season. Elephant Ears are also valued in suburbs adjacent to wildlife areas that have deer. Unless they are very hungry, deer tend to leave these plants alone. Even if deer should try to sample these plants, damage is generally low because there is generally a tastier alternative nearby. This characteristic is valuable because the gardener can depend on a stand of large plants that can also be used as an anchor or background in beds of other plants.

Elephant Ears can be overwintered much like caladiums. Some garden spots allow the plants to stay in the ground although it is a good idea to add extra layers of mulch. Do this only after they have been frozen back. Otherwise, the extra mulch is likely to lead to rot. As a rule, the

common varieties are considered hardier than the specialty varieties which tend to be more tender.

For most storage purposes, leaves can be trimmed off after they die back in the fall and before the first frost. When trimming the bulbs back foliage and excess soil should be removed. It is important to dry them before storage. Drying time is again generally about a week. They need to be stored in a breathable container. Another measure to take to avoid rot is to keep the bulbs separated by using dried shredded paper, shipping peanuts or rice hulls. They should also be dusted lightly with Sulphur.