

The East London Garden Society

Plant Facts

Calla Lily



The Calla Lily originates from the southern parts of Africa, namely South Africa up to Malawi, which is within the northern border of the African island Madagascar. This area has a tropical climate in which the Calla Lily finds itself at home with a steady temperature, rainy and dry seasons. As there is no real winter with cold winds and snow to worry about, there are Calla Lilies that bloom all year round provided they have a sufficient supply of water, energy and nutrition.

History - The name, Calla Lily is never used professionally since it is neither a calla nor a lily. Once it was thought to be a calla and the famous Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus, who discovered them, categorized all similar plants under the calla genus. When further testing proved that not all callas were closely related enough to be considered as one genus it was split up by the German botanist Karl Koch and the Calla Lily genus became known as the Zantedeschia Genus, named after the Italian botanist Giovanni Zantedeschi. All of them being related to each other under the family of Araceae.

Travelling to Europe - It is not clear when the Calla Lily showed up in Europe but based on an illustration from the Royal Garden in Paris in 1664, it is safe to say that it was grown in Europe at that time. It became a very popular flower, showing up at funerals, weddings and many festivities in Europe. It was especially popular since it could be made to bloom all year round in the southern to centre parts of Europe using simple greenhouses. It was a flower that could be grown even when the sky was dark.

Around the World - While spreading over the world, the Calla Lily also became a very popular motif for painters as the form and colours were extremely appealing to the eye of the beholder. But, it did not stop there, since the Calla Lily was sturdy and could survive for a long time even when removed from the plant. It therefore quickly became a popular cut flower. The lonely cut Calla Lily placed in a sleek tall white vase, is considered an interior decoration classic.