



Purple Haze

fresh

focus

Today's callas combine the classic silhouette with a new, high-fashion palette.

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Photos courtesy of Sande B.V., www.minicalla.com

Calla
Zantedeschia aethiopica
(large white or yellow)
Zantedeschia spp. (mini calla)

Availability: year round
Bunch size: Large callas are sold by the stem, while mini callas are in bunches of 10 stems.
Vase life: 5 to 10 days

The pure white calla, with its smooth flesh and sweeping art deco curve, is a powerful icon. Native to southern Africa, it had already traveled as far north as Rome during early times. The ancient Romans are said to have valued the flower so highly that they sometimes painted the edges of its inflorescence with gold. The flower has played a starring role in 20th-century art, from Diego Rivera to Georgia O'Keeffe.

The common name "calla lily" has encouraged many flower lovers to consider callas, like true lilies, as a symbol of purity. In fact, callas belong to an entirely different plant family, the arums. They are more closely related to spathiphyllums, anthuriums, caladiums, and philodendrons than to true lilies. The classic white (and sometimes yellow) callas of European cultural iconography belong to the genus *Zantedeschia*, named for an Italian botanist of the early 19th century, species *aethiopica*.



Red Sox

Today, however, the excitement on the commercial cut-flower scene lies with the "mini" callas, close relatives of *aethiopica* in the same genus, but of different species. Mini callas come in a broad and ever-expanding range of colors, including pink, rose, burgundy, deep purple, yellow, bronze, and orange, along with pure white. In addition to their range of colors, the mini callas often boast a longer vase life than standard callas. Their smaller size (the colored part of the calla typically



Crystal White

measures only two to three inches, versus four to eight inches for standard callas) and relatively slender stems also make them more versatile in design. Where white standard callas were once associated with funerals, the mini callas have become favorites for wedding work.

It should be noted that the white or colored part of a calla—what we typically think of as the "flower"—is actually a modified leaf structure (spathe). The true flowers are tiny and can be found on the spike (spadix) that protrudes from the center of the blossom. Careful observation of the spadix can reveal the bloom's state of maturity, suggested by the condition of the tiny true flowers, although the evidence is more difficult to read than in the case of an anthurium spadix. The fleshy calla stem rises from a thick rhizome; leaves are heart-shaped and typically dark green, although in some varieties they may be attractively speckled.

Although callas are regarded as elegant, sophisticated and exotic flowers in much of the Northern Hemisphere, they grow profusely in frost-free areas with plenty of rainfall. This point is illustrated with the story of a wealthy South African

who hired a London florist for his daughter's wedding. The client was scornful when the wedding featured dozens of callas, which he knew as a roadside weed called "pig lilies."

Here, there and everywhere

As with many other flowers, callas sold in North America may well have been grown in South America. (The tubers from which they were raised may have been produced in Holland or France.) In just the last couple of years, Ecuadorian production has substantially increased to meet market demand. In the past, growers routinely discarded the first crop from newly purchased bulbs, because the stems are shorter and the flowers smaller than was thought to meet minimum standards. Today, some growers are finding that these smaller flowers meet with a favorable response from customers.

Sande (based in a little Dutch village called 't Zand) is one of the world's leading calla breeders and producers. The breeding takes place in Holland, production in Kenya and Ecuador. Among the well-known varieties originating with Sande is Schwarzwald[®], a very dark purple, almost black mini calla, one of the first cultivars introduced by Sande not long after the company launched its calla program in 1983. Other Sande varieties include Picasso[®] (pink with a white edge) and other mini callas named after famous artists: yellow Rembrandt[®] and dark pink Renoir[®]. Salmon-pink Mozart[®] is noted not only for its striking and consistent color, but for its long, sturdy stems.

New Zealand is another top producer of both tubers and cut flowers. Over the past half century, active breeding programs have encouraged the development of callas as a commercial crop to the point where they are now New Zealand's second-largest cut-flower export. Although the climate in New Zealand is favorable for growing callas outdoors, growers increasingly opt for greenhouse production, which permits not only year-round harvesting but also better quality control.

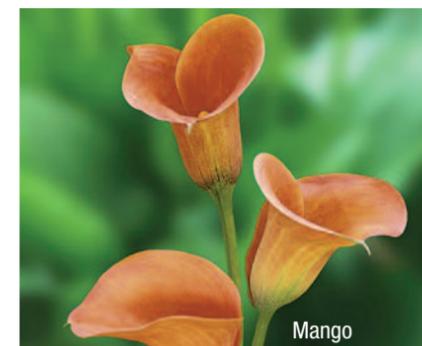
Callas ship well, in part because the foliage is easily separated from the flower stem, which means less surface area and greater retention of moisture

within the stem. Some growers pack the foliage separately. When the stem is re-cut and placed in flower-food solution, it re-hydrates efficiently. Designers have been known to leave the stems out of water long enough for them to become less turgid; they manipulate the stems to a desired curve, then re-cut and re-hydrate them.

A sleek, sophisticated flower now available in a whole new range of colors, callas offer outstanding value to florists and their customers alike. 🌿



Flores Gold



Mango



Naomi

Care tips

- Purchase callas with the colored spathe beginning to curve outward, an indication that the flower will continue to mature correctly. Immature flowers will not open properly. Avoid blossoms with the center spadix beginning to turn brown, as these are old flowers. Examine stems for bruises, which can result from lack of proper care in packaging.
- Remove the lower 1-2 inches of stem and place in a tepid flower food solution. Condition at room temperature for several hours or until desired blossom maturity is achieved. Store at 35 to 38 degrees F and 85% humidity.
- Callas are not highly sensitive to ethylene gas, but some studies have shown that anti-ethylene treatments can prolong callas' vase life.
- The soft stems of callas can be gently massaged into graceful curved lines to make extraordinary arm bouquets for weddings or for bold lines used in formal-linear designs.



Ruby Lite