Bulbs

December 3,2021

November is digging time at my house. I have several plants, that are bulbs in nature, that must be dug out of the ground and stored to survive the winter; dahlias, cannas, and calla lilies. Many times, when I talk to people about growing these plants they will say, with exasperation, “But you have to dig them in the fall.” They get no sympathy from me, as I have been digging them for 40 years. It is worth it to me.

I have two types of cannas. One has red foliage and in the right location with the right year, they will reach over 7 feet tall. They have red flowers but they are not very showy compared to the foliage. At one time I had a green leaf variety. That variety had a little more flower, but I have gone away from them. I also have dwarf cannas that do not get taller than three feet with a green foliage and more conspicuous yellow flowers. These bulbs are planted yearly, in early May, about 4 inches deep for the big ones and just underground, about an inch, for the smaller ones. The large plants will double their bulb numbers over the summer and store well in the winter. The smaller ones have a little more difficulty storing, but I still get enough to increase my numbers. I have seen people that start their dwarf cannas indoors in the spring so that by the time they transplant in mid-May they are in bloom.

The calla lilies are a mixture of colors and again they store and multiple well. Some of those bulbs will get to be the size of half a baseball, others maybe half dollar size. I plant them just under the ground in the spring. By this time, they already have white sprouts coming up from the top. There are beautiful colors of Callas. One year we purchased some black ones but they must not have made it through storage. They did not have much of a bulb at the end of that first year.

The dahlias I grow are red blooming and can get to be three feet tall. The bulbs can be the size of a baseball or smaller and multiply well. In the spring, I choose ones that already have a purple sprout emerging from them. They are ready to go and I have a bed of these 5 feet wide and 20 feet long. I have purchased and planted smaller multicolored varieties that are beautiful but the bulbs are small and do not store well over the winter for me. I am sure if I would take extra steps I could bring them to the next spring. But, when I am done, I have over 100 pounds of multiple tubers in my house and I just do not want to deal with finicky.

After digging up all those blubs, their tops are removed to be washed and dried. They are then stored in a box or plastic tub in a 70 degree or less, low-light basement for the winter waiting to be planted next year. This year after planting and giving away bulbs, those that were left were just dumped in a big hole and as Doris Day would sing, “Que sera, sera; Whatever will be, will be.”