

2018- The Year of Calibrachoa

This year the [National Garden Bureau](#) features Calibrachoa, often called trailing petunia, as its annual flower of the year.

Rise to Stardom

Few plants have seen a rise to stardom like Calibrachoa. The first plants appeared in US markets during the late 1980's, followed in the early 1990's by the first standout cultivar Million Bells, developed through Japanese breeding. Since then the number of cultivars has exploded.

Over the course of the last 20-30 years, Calibrachoa came from South America to Japan, to Europe and America, and then into your garden. When you consider that most of our other garden flowers have been around since the early 1800's or even the late 1700's, Calibrachoa is still a bit of a "new kid on the block".

They are such beautiful plants but, at first, they were fairly hard to grow. Although they did beautifully in hanging baskets and pots, they struggled in heavy garden soil. As it turns out, container gardening was the future, making Calibrachoa the right plant at the right time.

Origins

Calibrachoa is native to Brazil and a few other locations in Latin America, just like their "big brother" the Petunia. At one time, Calibrachoa was actually a part of the Petunia genus, but was later moved to a separate genus. There are about 28 different kinds of wild Calibrachoa, similar to the number of wild petunia varieties (about 21), but Calibrachoa has a much broader range of colors and are capable of generating a more complex mix of colors than petunias.

While many people refer to Calibrachoa as "mini-petunias" they are not really the same. Calibrachoa's native territory is cliff edges and rocky scree; from this, they bring some drought tolerance and preference for well-drained soils.

Fast forward to present times where the problems that made Calibrachoa finicky in the early days have been resolved. They are now more tolerant of a wider variety of soils and environments, though it is still a plant better suited for containers than most garden soils. Even with all the improvements, high pH or alkaline soils can be a problem.

Outstanding Color Selection

Calibrachoa has developed into one of the most popular annual flowers at garden centers and what really makes them stand out is the incredible variety of colors available. Every color of the rainbow appears in small jewel-like flowers, but that is only the beginning! Chose a dark-eyed flower, or a bright yellow eye, or a bright yellow star pattern radiating from the center of each bloom, or striped blooms - all of this in single or double flowers.



There is an amazing palette of colors available in every tone. Some colors will even change based on the temperature, deepening as it gets cooler, or fading as it gets warmer. Calibrachoa is really like the orchid of the bedding plants, the closer you look into each flower the more intricate the colors become.

Trailing petunias make an amazing statement in containers and hanging baskets, whether they are mixed with other flowers or all by themselves.

In the Garden

Growing Calibrachoa requires full sun, at least 6 hours of direct sun each day, more if possible. A well-drained soil, like most potting soils, is fine. Avoid heavy, cold, clay-based soils as they smother the roots.

Apply a balanced acidic plant fertilizer regularly will give the plant energy to produce thousands of flowers all season long.

In general, Calibrachoa are outstanding performers in containers, but as with all plants, avoid severe dry down and wilting. When a plant wilts, it shuts down all growth and repeated wilting causes the plant to become woody and less vigorous. Restarting the growth and flowering can take weeks and sometimes, depending on how much stress the plant receives, it may never fully recover.

So, this year, the Year of the Calibrachoa, try this wonderful plant in your hanging baskets and patio containers and bring some beautiful floral works of art into your garden!

For more information on this year's featured plants, visit the National Garden Bureau. www.ngb.org. The National Garden Bureau recognizes and thanks Rick Shoellhorn from Proven Winners as author and contributor to this fact sheet.

Your Suggestions are Welcome!

Is there a lawn and gardening topic you would like to learn more about? Sarah Browning is an Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension and can be contacted by phone 402 441-7180, by mail at 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE 68528: or by e-mail sarah.browning@unl.edu.



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