

GARDEN SPOT

A walkway of caladiums catches the eye



MARTY FIGLEY

I never know when an opportunity for a story will come up. We were driving down a street in Birmingham recently and a planting on either side of a sidewalk caught my eye. I said, "What an idea — how beautiful!" A day or so later I went to the house and talked to the owner, Barry Harrison, a local interior designer, about the wonderful, colorful display of caladiums marching up to the front porch, which, by the way, held containers of lush geraniums and other plants.

Harrison graciously agreed to tell me his secrets. The reason he chose caladiums for this area of the garden was that there is no sun. What a delightful choice. The colors of white, shades of greens, creams and maroons on the veined and marbled foliage were striking.

Harrison waited until the bulbs were on sale (the first of July in many stores) and bought 300 mixed varieties. He soaked the bulbs in homogenized milk for five days in the garage. This allowed the milk to ferment and "do its thing" with the bulbs. Then he planted them two inches deep, he said, "in the typical Birmingham soil — mostly clay," along the walk. The bulbs begin to come up in about 10 days. I visited the first part of August and some of the plants were still emerging. Others were in bloom. Near the sidewalk, Elephant's Ear bulbs were planted to add height and a solid green tone. The leaves of this plant get quite large and added an interesting note. In a house the leaves of this bulb can grow three to five feet long.

The leaves on the caladiums were exceptionally large. Perhaps the reason is that Harrison fertilized them with

Stern's Miracle-Gro with a much more concentrated solution than is recommended. He mixed eight teaspoons of Miracle-Gro to a gallon of water and fed the plants "every seven to 10 days." He does NOT recommend this for any other plants. The strong solution would ordinarily kill them.

He will use the colorful leaves of the caladiums in indoor floral arrangements. He seals the ends of the stems with melted glue so that their beauty can be enjoyed for many days.

These plants will continue to be beautiful until frost cuts them down. Then Harrison will dig them and store them in a mesh bag or nylon hose in a cool place until time to replant them for a repeat performance.

"I may braid the foliage and hang them to store them for the winter," he said.

These lovely plants could follow a spring show of tulips or other spring bulbs that bloom before the shade takes over. I guarantee the walk to the front door will be slower while visitors admire the colors and forms of caladiums if you use this idea along your entrance path.

Caladiums and Elephant's Ear belong to the Araceae (Arum Family) of large-leaved herbs. They are native to the tropical Americas and are often used as bedding plants, where they can be set out after the danger from frost is over.

This visit with Harrison was an eye-opener to me and an invitation to you to let me know if you have an extraordinary planting, or know of a neighbor who does. Write to me at The Eccentric, 605 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009, and tell me about special treasures or your discoveries. If we can't visit to see them before winter arrives, there is always next season.

Share a row

Share a Row for the Hungry, sponsored by the Garden Writers Association of America, is still going strong. I wrote about this in May and want to remind you that extra produce can be given to, in Oakland County: Food Bank of Oakland County, (810) 332-1373; The Lighthouse, Pontiac, (810) 335-2452; Neighborhood House, Rochester, (810) 651-5836; and in Wayne County: Hunger Action Coalition, (313) 963-7788. For other locations, call Second Harvest, in Chicago, (312) 263-2303.

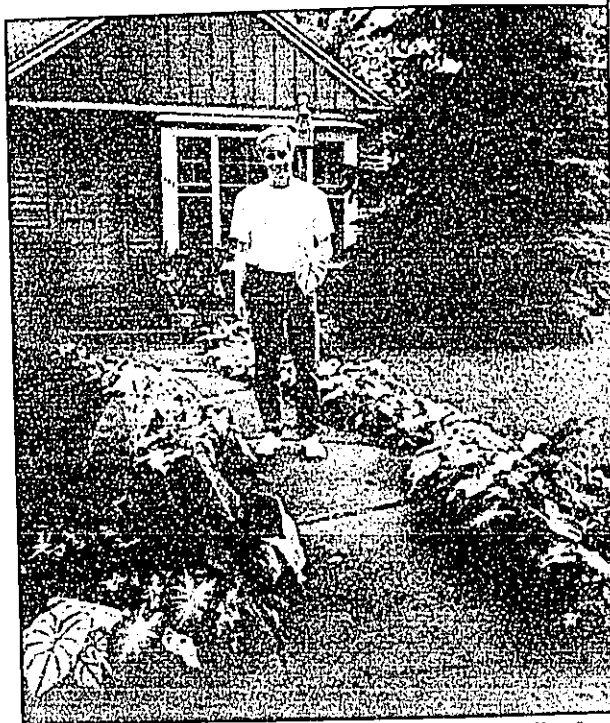
TIMELY GARDEN TIPS

■ For best selection, buy bulbs now, store at room temperatures until ready to plant.

■ When you visit Cranbrook Gardens, stop in the greenhouse to buy plants 10 a.m. to noon Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.

■ Watch mum foliage; if it looks wilted, water.

■ Start fall garden cleanup.



MARTY FIGLEY

Colossal caladiums: Caladiums line the sidewalk of Barry Harrison's home.

■ Put cole crops plants in the garden for late fall and winter harvest.

Marty Figley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham. You can

leave her a message by dialing (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then her mailbox number, 1859. Her fax number is (810) 644-1314.

English Gardens holds seminars on gardening

English Gardens conducts free seminars this month and next on topics ranging from perennial gardening to preparing your roses for winter.

The seminars, open to the public, take place 7 p.m. Wednesdays at the West Bloomfield store, 6370 Orchard Lake Road. For more information, call English Gardens at (810) 851-7505.

Topics, speakers and dates are: "Plant Spring Flowering Bulbs Now," Lorrie O'Brien, Sept. 13; "Attracting Birds to Your Yard," Bill Stafford, Sept. 20; "Updating Your Landscapes," Kevin Collins, Sept. 27; "Beautiful Your Home with Dried and Silk Flowers," Suzanne Habitz, Oct. 4; "Preparing Your Roses for Winter," Dick Schmitt, Oct. 11; and "Winterizing Your Garden," Kevin Collins, Oct. 18.

UM holds gardeners' sale

Mums, trees, shrubs, peonies, poppies, wildflowers, grasses and bulbs are among the unusual plants being offered at the University of Michigan Matthaei Botanical Gardens Friends annual Fall Gardeners' Sale fund-raiser, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, Sept. 16-17, at the gardens.

Patrons attending can choose from more than 185 robust, hardy mums and several unusual and sought-after landscape trees and shrubs that can be planted now.

Admission is free, and there is plenty of free parking on site. Refreshments will be available for a fee. The gardens are at 1800 N. Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor. Take US-23 north to Geddes Road. Head east on Geddes Road to Dixboro Road. Turn left onto Dixboro Road and go 2 1/4 miles north. For more information, call (313) 998-7061.

Among the special items being offered will be the showy Yellow Magnolia

(Magnolia x "Elizabeth"). The neat growth habit, medium rate of growth and pyramidal shape make this a landscape gem. Another special offering to this year's sale will be the Big Bluestem (Andropogon gerardii). This colorful, prairie native grass grows five to six feet tall and is spectacular after the first frost when the grass turns light red.

An assortment of barefoot dormant early spring wildflowers that are better suited to a fall planting will also be available. Several hundred choice perennials will be offered including hardy chrysanthemums, ornamental grasses, daylilies, hosta and poppies. The assortment and variety of bulbs include daffodils, tulip, crocus and hyacinth.

The selection on some plant quantities may be limited, and shoppers may want to come early to be assured of their first choice. A Members' Sale will take place 9-7 a.m. Friday, Sept. 15.