

Enjoy year-round color



Margo Roten
Ask a Master Gardener

Question: My coleus plants die every winter. Is there a way to enjoy coleus all year round?

Answer: Coleus are not native to our area and cannot tolerate the cold. Although Coleus plants are very easy to grow and propagate, if you want to enjoy these gorgeous plants all year round, you will have to give them extra attention during the winter and closely emulate their favorite conditions.

Coleus is thought to be from some tropical areas of Africa and Asia where they enjoy the perfect tropical weather conditions in which to thrive. In our area they cannot survive outside in the winter. That said, there are a couple of things you can do to keep them alive in the winter.

For coleus plants, cold is anything below 70 degrees. This means your house must be 70 degrees or above during the time your coleus is indoors.

If you have planted these in the ground, you can transplant them to pots to move indoors or take cuttings so you will have many plants from them to enjoy next spring and summer. Fortunately, coleus is very easy to propagate from cuttings and to grow from seed.

Coleus has some very basic requirements. They thrive in heat, want free-draining soil, morning and afternoon shade and moist (not wet) soil. Fertilize when planted and again in mid-summer to maximize growth and enrich color.

To further encourage growth, pinch back branches early in the summer. To prolong the



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The coleus plant is not usually grown for the flowers, but rather for their spectacular leaves. Seen here are coleus with their tiny flowers.

life of plant, cut off all flower spikes. The coleus plant is not usually grown for the flowers, but rather for their spectacular leaves. However, some people like the tiny flowers, so this is optional.

With the popularity of the coleus more types have been developed, some with more colors, some that are more tolerant of sun and even some that trail (for hanging pots). But, in general, follow these basics:

For cuttings in soil: Using a clean, sharp blade, take cuttings of approximately 5-6 inches and just below a leaf node. Trim off all but the top four leaves. If desired, use a rooting compound. Dip the end of the cutting into the compound, tap off excess and insert in a small, pencil-sized hole in moistened potting soil. Keep moist. Place in a sunny location but not in direct sun.

For cuttings in water: Follow directions above

but place in water instead of soil. Change water every other day. Watch for roots. When several healthy roots appear, transfer to pots with potting soil.

For seeds: Mix seeds with fine sand for a more even distribution of seeds. Spread seed mixture on moist potting soil, then cover with another thin layer of moist potting soil. Cover all with clear plastic, making sure that there is enough room for the seedlings to come up without hitting the plastic. Place in a bright, sunny area with no direct sun. Keep moist. They will sprout in 10 to 14 days. At that time remove the plastic.

When bringing any potted plants indoors, check for pests. Use neem oil, water mixed with dishwashing liquid and/or pick the pests off by hand.

When bringing in cuttings, submerge in water making sure the entire cutting is underwater



With the popularity of the coleus more types have been developed. These fall colored coleus are one such example.

for several minutes. This will kill any bugs that you may have missed with your visual inspection.

By following these basic guidelines, you should be able to enjoy those vivid splashes of color

year after year.

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at

541-236-3052 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.