

Kalanchoe

History

Kalanchoe blossfeldiana is native to the island of Madagascar, where it grows in the relatively cool plateaus of the Tsarantanana Mountains. In its natural habitat, *K. blossfeldiana* grows in humus soil and forms small upright shrubs.

Charles Swingle, a researcher with the U.S Department of Agriculture, introduced the kalanchoe into the United States in 1928. In the greenhouse, kalanchoe is grown as a flowering pot plant.

Description

Kalanchoes are considered a biennial or even a triennial plant, meaning it takes two or three years from seed germination to reach the flowering stage. The flowering period of these blooming plants lasts four to eight weeks.

The plant grows 8 to 12 inches tall with masses of small, four-petaled leaves that are red, orange, yellow and purple. When in flower, the stem rises well above the topmost leaves and branches to form 14 to 70 flowers. Each flower petal is about an inch long.

Modern kalanchoes are characterized by vigorous but compact growth, strong flower stems, uniform development, and long-lasting flowers and leaves. They have thick, waxy foliage with a succulent appearance.

The edges of the leaf are saw-toothed, and the plantlets develop between these teeth. A pair of leaves is at each node; nodes are opposite one another. Each leaf pair is rotated 90 degrees from the previous pair.

Light

Kalanchoes are great plants. They can adapt to any environment.

In the fall, continue to give bright light, but no more than twelve hours per day. Let the plants experience normally short fall days without artificial light after dark.

Excessive light levels in summer cause discoloration of the foliage and fading flower colors.

Temperature

Temperatures of 14-18° C. at night and in to the 20s by day are proper. Slightly higher temperatures at night are acceptable if the plant is given strong light with good air circulation. Kalanchoes love sun, but cooler temperatures inhibit flower development and higher temperatures delay flowering.

Soil

Kalanchoes do well in a mixture of two parts all-purpose potting soil and one part clay. Repot when necessary. In early spring, begin applications of a balanced fertilizer every three weeks. In mid summer, add a teaspoon of bone meal, scratched into the topsoil.

These plants do not need a lot of water, only when the soil feels dry to the touch. The plant should not remain in the drained water, however, because root rot will develop.

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