



Heat-Loving Plants Create Tropical Look

Although a lot of plants start to wind down when the thermometer goes up, some plants revel in the high temperatures of mid to late summer. Among these plants are many exotic looking tropical beauties. Group several of these together in a corner of your garden, then add a fountain, birdbath or other water feature and some comfortable seating, and create your own mini island retreat.

Start creating your little piece of paradise by planting some lush, large-leafed plants. If your garden area is sunny, cannas are a great choice. Grow them for both their brilliant, showy flowers and for their large, upright foliage. These plants have been extensively bred, and there is a variety to suit almost any garden space, from dwarf varieties less than two feet tall to giants up to seven feet, with flowers in just about every color except blue. Flowering starts in mid summer and continues on through fall. Foliage can be green, bronze, striped, or any combination thereof. Australia is a cultivar with especially stunning foliage, deep burgundy, almost black, topped by showy, brilliant red flowers. For very tropical-looking foliage, plant the banana-leafed variety, *Canna musafolia*. It features large, towering green banana-like leaves. Although this type of canna is grown mostly for its foliage, flowers, when they appear, are very attractive to hummingbirds. If you have the space, group several cannas together to create a dazzling display. For the best results, grow cannas in full sun and fertile soil, and water during dry spells. Remove spent blooms to ensure continuous flowering.

Angels Trumpet (*Brugmansia*) is a good choice for those in search of something different and dramatic. This plant is a tree or shrub in its native environment, and it grows to five or six feet tall even as a potted plant. It has an upright habit, and large, bold foliage. What are truly impressive, though, are its enormous, fragrant, trumpet-shaped flowers that dangle like oversized bells from its branches from summer into autumn. Although it sounds as though it would have white flowers, the variety Snowbank features peachy colored blooms and large, interesting leaves that are green with a broad creamy border. Angels Trumpet performs well in containers, and it likes a spot in part sun in moist, well-drained soil, with regular summer feedings.

If your space is more limited, try grouping together some pots of tropical Hibiscus plants. Grow them for their beautiful, shiny green foliage and stunning blooms in bright shades of yellow, red, pink and white. They are available in various sizes, from small plants to larger bushes, and sometimes in tree form, or even with braided stems. They grow well in pots and can be moved around as needed, or as conditions warrant. If you just cannot part with your Hibiscus when the weather grows cold, it can be brought inside to winter as a houseplant.



Agapanthus is another good choice to add color to your patio or deck, thriving well in large containers. Its large clusters of tubular flowers stand on long stems and look like a starburst. Choose from blue or white shades, and harvest a few for the vase, too. They make excellent cut flowers. Grow them in full sun in moist, well-drained, fertile soil.

Of course, you cannot have a tropical garden without some tropical vines. For a delightful, sweet scent reminiscent of southern nights, grow some twining jasmine. Support it with a trellis or arch, or let it scramble over a shrub. Just be sure to place some seating nearby so garden visitors can enjoy the intoxicating scent of its little white, starry flowers. Grow jasmine in pots or in the ground, in a sunny to partly sunny location in fertile, well-drained soil.



Another tropical vine, Mandevilla, is grown for its showy, funnel-shaped pink, red or white flowers. This vine can grow quite large, needing a trellis to keep it upright, but the Pretty series stays smaller and can be grown without support. Give this plant a spot in the sun, but shade it during the hottest part of the day if possible. Mandevilla grows well in pots, and is easy to over winter as a houseplant.

For shady gardens, tropical foliage plants will add drama. For impressive, large leaves, it is hard to beat elephant ears (Alocasia). Their huge, arrow-shaped leaves are heavily veined, often in a sharply contrasting color, providing a bold backdrop for low-growing ferns and shade-loving annuals like impatiens, New Guinea impatiens or begonias. The variety Frydek is a study in contrast, featuring velvety black leaves with distinct white veins, and new growth in a lime green shade. Alocasia calidora is a large, upright plant with thick, wavy green foliage.

Caladium is another shade loving foliage plant. The leaves on this plant need no help from flowers. They are colorful enough to stand on their own. Foliage is vividly colored and heavily veined in contrasting shades of pink, red, green or white, or a combination of these. Some varieties look as though they were splattered with paint or feature a contrasting border as well. Caladium likes high humidity and a well-drained soil that is rich in organic matter. They perform especially well in containers in a spot where they will not be tattered by the wind.



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