

## COLEUS

Coleus plants are very popular for container gardening and hanging baskets both outdoors, and as indoor houseplants. They also look great planted directly in the garden in groups, or as borders. It provides amazing color and contrast for those partially shaded areas for which color is hard to come by. Coleus plant, also known as Painted Nettle, is often grown outdoors as an annual because it is frost-tender. But it's easy to grow indoors if provide bright light.

Coleus one of the rare plants that are grown almost exclusively for colorful foliage. In this regard, they're like crotons, but they're smaller and perhaps somewhat easier to grow inside. Coleus are truly in their glory in masses—their leaves are available in green, purple, orange, red, yellow, and in a striking array of patterns. Coleus are also fun plants to propagate; new plants



grown from seed will be new creations.

Coleus grows as an annual and is a non-edible ornamental / houseplant. Being an annual plant, it tends to grow best over the course of a single year. Coleus is known for growing to a height of approximately 1.24 feet (that's 38.0 cm in metric) with a spreading habit.

Coleus is normally quite a low maintenance plant and is normally very easy to grow - great for beginner gardeners. The plants grow well in moist well-drained soil. They are heat-tolerant, though they do less well in full sun in subtropical areas than in the shade. In mild areas (no snow in winter), plants can usually be kept as perennials if well managed. Whereas cultivation in colder areas, they are often grown as annuals as they are not hardy and become leggy and unattractive with age. Though this is usually resolved by pinching back growing tips to encourage bushing. In bright hot areas, the colors of the plant will typically be more intense in shaded areas than in full sun, and the plants will require less water there.

### **Plant Propagation:**

Coleus plants are grown from seed or cuttings. Sow seeds by spreading them thinly. Cover seeds with 1/8" of seed starting soil. Then, water lightly. Plants germinate and grow rapidly, if the soil temperature is kept at 70 degrees or higher.

Growing Coleus from cuttings is also easy. Select healthy, new growth coleus plants for cutting. Place the cuttings in soft, rich soil. Keep the soil moist but not wet at all times. Covering them with glass or plastic will raise the humidity, and help them to root.

## Transplanting Coleus

Before transfer to garden, accustom to conditions by moving to a sheltered place outside for a



week.

### Repotting:

A large coleus will reach only 2-3 feet. They grow rapidly in the spring, but many people don't overwinter them, so they never bother repotting the plant. If choose to grow coleus for more than one season, than trimming the plant back after the winter, refreshing the soil, and keeping it in the same pot. Alternatively, go up one pot size.

### Varieties:

There are actually about 60 species of coleus, all native to Asia and Malaysia. However, virtually all of the coleus available are derived from the single *C. Blumei* species, crossed with a few other species. Hybridizing work within this group has been extensive—there are literally



hundreds, if not thousands, of cultivars.



**Planting new Coleus:** New Coleus plants should be planted in a good quality soil mix as soon as possible after arrival. New Coleus plant in its permanent pot it should be planted in a 4" pot and grown on until transplant time. If planning to planting Coleus directly in the ground, it will be beneficial to first plant them in a 4" pot and allow them to develop a larger root system before asking them to fend for themselves out in the elements.

For their permanent home, a single Coleus plant will do well planted in a 6"-8" pot, while three or four Coleus may be planted in a 10"-12" (or larger) pot. All pots should have drainage holes. The soil mix should be high quality, airy, and well-drained, with lots of organic material. A time-release fertilizer for annual plants is highly recommended. Other product useful is soil additives such as crystals that swell up into a jelly when water is applied. They are excellent for helping to keep Coleus hydrated on hot days. They store up to 400 times their weight in water and acting as a reservoir during dry periods. Coleus can also benefit from root stimulating products that add mycorrhizae to the soil.

**"harden-off" Coleus:** After potting Coleus, place them outdoors everyday for 3-4 hours in full or partial shade in a wind-sheltered location. Gradually increase the time outdoors every day, and by the end of the first week plant should be able to gradually begin to acclimate to their permanent location. A temporary windbreak or sun protection should be offered for a time if the Coleus is planted in an exposed location. Regular daily watering of

exposed Coleus is crucial to their survival. Close attention should still be given to the amount of heat, cold, sun, and wind your Coleus receives for at least two more weeks after hardening off and protection should be available at any time during the summer if inclement weather or sudden cold snaps threaten your plants.

### **Coleus Plant Care and Maintenance:**

**Sun or Shade:**In the tropical parts of the world where Coleus grow naturally, they are generally found in high shade or dappled shade. We find that some sun in the morning and protection from noon and afternoon sun is optimal for bringing out the best color, but not everyone has those perfect conditions. Coleus can be surprisingly adaptable as long as they are not allowed to get too dry. The amount of light Coleus plants receive will affect their coloration, so the same variety of Coleus grown in two different locations in yard may vary in appearance. A Coleus grown in full sun might create more pigmentation to protect itself from the sun and this may dramatically alter the look of the plant. Too much strong sun might result in sunscald, which can have a bleaching effect on the leaf and cause crispy edges and brown, thin spots on the leaves that might eventually become holes. Conversely, they might become "greened out" by the excess coloring produced by the plant to protect itself from the sun. Most Coleus can take some sun, especially if it is morning sun, and several can tolerate full sun if properly acclimated.

**Temperature:** All Coleus are tender and cannot survive freezing temperatures. Coleus are native to some of the warmest climates in the world, but think tropical, not desert. Coleus are native to lands that lie close to the equator, which means the average temperature is 90 degrees Fahrenheit all year and there are no seasons other than monsoon seasons. There is absolutely no frost, so Coleus grows as herbaceous perennials. They can take an enormous amount of heat as long as they are grown in good soil that is kept evenly moist. In their native land they are usually found growing in high shade or dappled shade, and that makes the heat easier to bear. When planning where to place Coleus keep in mind their tropical origin and try to duplicate it as closely as possible. While Coleus like it hot, they can do reasonably well in cooler temperatures as long as they don't fall lower than 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Temperatures in the 50s and 40s are survivable, but sustained cool temperatures will adversely affect the vigor and color of the Coleus and make it susceptible to disease. Freezing temperatures are deadly to Coleus and even a light frost will destroy the plant.

**Watering and Fertilizing:** Coleus prefers their roots to be in soil that is evenly moist but not soggy. The more Coleus is exposed to sun and wind, the more often they will need to be watered. Daily or twice-daily watering may be necessary during very hot or windy weather, especially as the Coleus mature and develop a large leaf canopy. Coleus that have wilted will usually respond quickly when watered, but Coleus that have been repeatedly allowed to wilt will quickly show signs of wear and tear that make them less attractive: crispy edges, dry brown spots on the leaves, bleaching, and dull color. Drip irrigation is great for plants grown in pots or in the ground because it keeps the water off the leaves. Watering is best done in the early

morning so the leaves have time to dry before the sun hits them. Coleus leaves should always be dry by the time darkness falls to decrease the chance of fungal disease occurring. Coleus do not show their best color when over fertilized, so fertilize with liquid fertilizer at half strength on a regular basis, or use a time release fertilizer (recommended). If keep coleus indoors for the winter, fertilize less often during the winter months and increase fertilization frequency when the days begin to lengthen in the spring.

**Pruning:** Pinching the growing tips of Coleus when they are young will increase branching and make plant bushier. Keep in mind that a Coleus that is allowed to bloom heavily will lose vigor and beauty as it puts its energy into making seeds instead of growing beautiful leaves. It doesn't hurt Coleus to be pinched and pruned. In fact, it is often necessary to prune Coleus in mid-summer to help the plant keep its shape and freshen its appearance.

Mulch is recommended for Coleus grown in the ground to retain even moisture around the roots and prevent weeds. Do not use cedar mulch as the cedar oil can be toxic to coleus plants. Make sure the mulch is not touching the stems of the coleus as this could cause rot.

**Coleus Pests:** The best way to control pests is by regularly inspecting plants and taking immediate action if see signs of pests or disease. Individual insects or small colonies are eradicated far more easily and safely than large outbreaks.

The most common pest of Coleus is mealy bugs, which look like little tufts of white fuzz on the stems, leaves, and leaf axils. They are very slow moving and can be eliminated by a cotton swab dipped in alcohol or by an insecticide spray .Spider Mites can be identified by the tiny webs that form on the underside of leaves and the presence of poppy-seed sized red mites. Spider mites flourish when the humidity is low, and can be controlled by careful monitoring and cleaning of the leaves, increasing the humidity near the plants, or spraying the leaves with a soap spray.

**Coleus Diseases:** Coleus, when provided with a good location and the correct amount of light, water, warmth, and air circulation, are quite resistant to disease. Make sure their location is protected from cool temperatures, excessive wind, dripping from roofs or gutter, and harsh sunlight. Soggy soil and cool temperatures are a combination that invites fungal diseases such as botrytis, stem rot, and powdery mildew. Avoid overhead watering if possible and try to get the water directly to the soil. Water early in the day so the leaves are dry by evening.

Regularly inspect Coleus and remove dropped leaves from the soil around the Coleus so disease organisms cannot linger there and reproduce. A few leaves dropped here and there are normal, but take note if leaf drop is sudden and excessive. Look carefully for leaves and stems that are damaged, wilted, disfigured, have black or darkened leaves or stems, black or ringed spots, or any sign of fuzzy mold or mildew (black or white). Prune and discard any leaves or stems that show symptoms and disinfect all scissors or pruning shears in bleach water or rubbing alcohol when moving from one Coleus to another.

**Coleus as Houseplants:** Coleus can be grown as houseplants, but particular attention must be given to light, water, humidity, and pest control. Any Coleus can be kept in the house, so you are limited only by the amount of brightly lit space you have available. plant should turn regularly when grown in a window so the plant doesn't lean too much in one direction. If don't have a window that allows bright light than supplementing with florescent fixtures. Many people grow their Coleus under florescent grow-lights or use them as a supplement to natural light. LED grow lights are also available.

Like most houseplants, Coleus should be watered carefully. They don't want to be soggy but they don't want to be too dry either. Care must be taken not to overwater indoor Coleus, nor should they be allowed to get so dry that the plants wilt. They like a higher level of humidity than most houses have so they benefit from daily misting early in the day.

Coleus will sometimes become lanky when grown indoors, so don't be afraid to pinch and prune indoor Coleus to keep it tidy and prevent flowering. Another thing to keep in mind is that Coleus sometimes have different coloration in the winter months, especially when kept in a house. Usually they return to their original coloration when the days lengthen or they are



moved outdoors for the summer.