

Zantedeschia aethiopica

[Synonyms : *Arum aethiopicum flore albo odorato*, *Calla aethiopica*, *Richardia africana*]

CALLA LILY is a (sometimes evergreen) perennial. Native to South Africa (particularly the Transvaal), it has a yellow flower spike (spadix) surrounded by a large white or cream petal-like leaf (spathe).

It is also known as *Aireume* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Altar-lily, *Arum d’Ethiopie* (French), Arum lily, *Bocas de Jarro* (Portuguese), *Cala* (Canary Island), *Calla*, *Calla d’Afrique* (French), *Calla of gardeners*, Cape arum, Common arum lily, Common calla, Common calla lily, Funeral lily, Jack-in-the-pulpit, *Jarros* (Portuguese), *Kala* (Czech), *Kalla* (Swedish), *Kornoutice africká* (Czech), *Kornútovka africká* (Slovak), Lily of the Nile, *Papierblume* (German), Pig lily, *Richardia africká* (Slovak), *Richardie* (Czech, French), *Richardia africká* (Slovak), *Richardie africká* (Czech), *Stuekalla* (Danish), Trumpet lily, *Varkblom* (Afrikaans), White calla lily, Wild pig-lily, and *Zimmer-Calla* (German); and in flower language is said to symbolize magnificent beauty.

Warning – all parts of the plant are poisonous if consumed unboiled and can severely irritate the throat with effects more severe than those from dumbcane (*Dieffenbachia seguine*).

Aethiopica means ‘of or from Africa’.

The African Khoi tribe has used the processed roots to make ‘hottentot bread’, and young leaves have been eaten as a cooked vegetable.

Birds enjoy the berries, and underground stems have been fed to livestock with other fodder, particularly pigs.

As in England with dumbcane (*Dieffenbachia seguine*) early settlers in South Africa sometimes played a horrid trick on newcomers. They would replace accepted edible roots with calla lily root. As however the effects of the latter are even more virulent than the discomfort experienced from dumbcane this prank tended to create considerable (and often lasting) ill-feeling.

The flowers are in demand for flower arranging or Church decorations for the Christian Easter celebrations although in Britain especially they tend to be associated with funerals.

In the art world arum lilies have lured many artists either as a single subject or one of symbolic or perceptive significance. Although better known among his countrymen for other subjects, in a painting of an calla lily with roses and gladioli Breitner (1857-1923) the Dutch artist who is held by so many authorities to be one of the leaders of Dutch Impressionism, has portrayed the flower with such domination that it is the calla lily which draws the eye inexorably. On the other hand his younger peer who has reached a far wider audience, Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) seems to have had an even greater attraction to the flower as he portrays it in several oil paintings and charcoal drawings.

The juice from the plant stains material brown.

Medicinally, warmed leaves have been used locally (including by the African Xhosa tribe and settlers) as poultices to ease headaches and heal sores and boils.