

A GUIDE TO
Houseplants



Five Easy Starter Plants

Your thumb may be black, but you want your home to be green. That's OK! We've got some easy starter plants that even you can't kill.

SPIDER PLANT

These punk rock house plants have arching, spiky, usually green and white leaves. Over time, a happy spider plant will send out plantlets that look like spiders coming off a web. You can repot those little guys to create new plants, or leave them to trail, whatever you like. Spider plants like well-drained soil and bright, indirect light, but are tough guys that are hard to kill. Repot them only when their roots become visible and the plant gets hard to water.

SANSEVIERIA

Also called snake plant or mother-in-law's tongue, these fleshy, spiky plants are bulletproof. They like light, but can handle darkness and they don't care for too much watering, so forgetting about them for a little while is just fine by them. They are also available in a variety of colors and heights, from the impressive wide, thick whale tail to plants with thinner spikes.

PEPEROMIA

There are more than 1,000 species of peperomia to choose from. Their thick, waxy leaves come in a variety of colors, including vibrant pink and red shades. You can plant several of them together for great variety in one, easy-to-care-for pot. These guys are extremely forgiving and don't often get more than a foot tall, so they make a great desk plant. Give them indirect light and a well-draining potting medium (even orchid medium is fine), and you're off and growing.

CAST IRON PLANT

There's a reason it's called cast iron. This member of the lily family, native to China and Japan, is notoriously hard to kill and can live up to 50 years. It has long, dark green leaves and is a slow grower that tends to stay where it's put. It does well with low light, low humidity and fluctuations in temperature. The only thing it doesn't like is overwatering, so hold back on the love and water it about once a week or whenever it dries out.

Peperomia



Spider plant



What Are Succulents?

Succulents are a type of plant with thick, fleshy leaves that the plant uses to store water. They come in a range of colors, shapes and types that go from earthy to otherworldly.

They tend to thrive in drier climates and don't like a lot of humidity, making them good for the climate controlled indoors.

POTTING

Succulents, because they like to be dry, need a pot with draining holes and a medium that drains well. If they're left in water for any amount of time, they'll rot. Consider adding rocks or gravel to your potting soil to help it drain or, better yet, use a soil specially formulated for succulents and cacti.

SUNLIGHT

Because most succulents come from arid climates, they do like exposure to light, but can also tolerate periods of darkness. Most species will change color drastically if exposed to more sunlight than the plant is used to, so you can actually use sunlight exposure to make your succulent arrangements more visually interesting.

PROPAGATION

Succulents are champions of propagation. Many times,



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all it takes is a dropped leaf to create an entirely new plant. You can also create new plants by cutting a leaf or a stem. Leave the leaves or cuttings on top of dry soil and in just a few days, you'll notice new roots.

SUCCULENTS AS HOUSEGUESTS

Like most houseplants, suc-

culents give off oxygen and remove toxins from your indoor air, meaning they can create a healthier environment in your home.

Succulents also add water to the air, and studies indicate that being around plants can improve your feelings of wellness, making your home more warm and hospitable.

OTHER TYPES OF PLANTS

Often grouped together with succulents are tillandsia (air plants) and various types of cacti. All require similar care and can add interest to your indoor succulent garden. All of these plants, succulents included, also bloom with vibrant, interesting flowers in

the right conditions.

The only difference in these species is that, while succulents and cacti require a well-drained planting medium, tillandsia require none at all. They don't have roots at all and can be displayed hanging from fixtures or placed on walls. Just keep them out of direct sunlight as they burn easily.

Creating a Growing Space

Once you get started with your house plants, you may find that it gets more addicting.

As you get more and more plants, you may need a greenhouse space to keep them all growing. Here's how you can get set up.

WHAT GREENHOUSES DO

Greenhouses provide protection for your plants year-round and can extend the growing season for food plants and even ornamental and flowering plants. They also provide protection from pests, including deer and insects. They also protect your plants against excessive cold or heat from outside.

Today's greenhouses are made from glass or plastic surrounding a frame. Sunlight can shine in, giving the plants energy for growth and trapping the warmth and energy from the sun, keeping it warmer and more humid than it is outside

STYLES OF GREENHOUSES

You can find a variety of greenhouse kits on the market today. They come in all shapes and sizes (and budgets!). The experts at your local gardening center or home center can help you pick out the right one for your area and plants.

LOCATION

Look for a full-sun location



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for your greenhouse. If it's too bright in your greenhouse, you can always add shade later, but it's much harder to add more sun. Think about how the sun will change given the season if you plan to use your greenhouse year-round. Also think about if you'll need power run

to the greenhouse. For instance, you may need supplemental lighting during the darker winter days to keep your plants growing.

Also look for a location that's protected from winds and storms, especially if you live in an area prone to these events.

You can tuck a greenhouse in next to a house, fence or other structure rather than in your open yard.

You'll also want your greenhouse near a water source to provide moisture or to at least be near enough to carry watering cans back and forth. Lastly,

consider the ground where you want to put it. Is it level or does it need work? Can you easily lay out a strong, level surface for your structure? Concrete pavers or blocks may work, but some growers go with rot-resistant wood or even gravel if the surface is level enough.

Pothos: A Classic Houseplant

If you've seen any houseplants at all, you've probably seen a pothos. They're often mistakenly called ivy because they're a trailing, vining green plant with heart-shaped leaves.

They're one of the most popular houseplants to grow because they're hardy and come in varieties that have splashes of yellow, cream or white on their leaves.

GROWING CONDITIONS

Pothos tolerate low light, but also grow well in medium and high-light spots. They also forgive the occasional missed watering and low humidity. Choose a well-draining potting soil and water the plant when the first inch or so is dry. You don't need to fertilize a lot — twice a year should be OK — and you can use a general purpose fertilizer from the garden center.

VARIETIES

Pothos come in a wide variety of sizes, shapes and colors. Here are a few to look for.

- **Golden:** This is one of the most common types of pothos. It features green leaves with splashes of yellow.
- **Marble queen:** These highly variegated plants weave together dark green and white splotches on heart-shaped



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leaves that are slightly more pointy than the golden pothos. These tend to grow more slowly than other pothos varieties.

- **Neon:** Characterized by bright, lime green leaves, this pothos does best with bright light for maximum color.

- **Manjula:** This pothos was originally produced by the University of Florida. It has

curvy edges to the leaves so they don't lay flat. These leaves are variegated with cream, silver and white and each leaf is different.

- **Pearls and jade:** Featuring white-tipped, dark green leaves, this pothos was also produced at the University of Florida. The white parts of the plant usually have green and silver-gray shades, too.

- **Silver:** The leaves on this plant are dark green flecked with silver spots. They tend to be smaller than other type of pothos.

- **Cebu blue:** Cebu blue pothos have arrow-shaped blue green leaves with a slight metallic gleam.

Like Pokemon, you'll soon find that you have to catch them all.

CARE

With all pothos, watch for roots poking out of the bottom of the pot and prepare to repot them if you spot this. Also remove any brown or damaged leaves as soon as you see them. Propagating pothos is also easy; usually, trimming off a vine and putting it in water until it grows roots does the trick.

Trending Tropicals

Nothing gives your home a jungle-like vibe like a few well-placed tropical plants.

Don't be intimidated by the word tropical, either. Most of these plants are easy keepers that can enrich your space with little to no effort on your part.

ALOCASIA

Also called Amazon elephant's ear, alocasia have large, arrow-shaped green leaves ribbed with silver. They prefer rich but fast-draining soil and require regular fertilization. Keep them in indirect light and avoid wet roots. Also be careful around pets and children, this kind of plant can be toxic.

ANTHURIUM

This plant puts out bright pink flowers (also called the Mexican shrimp plant) that contrast with the older, dark green leaves. Give them loose, rich potting soil that drains well, and bright, indirect light for the best color.

BIRDS OF PARADISE

Probably the most recognizable tropical, birds of paradise have large, distinctive flowers shaped like a bird. It can grow up to six feet tall and may need three to five years of growth before they flower. Keep them in bright light with some direct sun with regular water and fer-



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tilizer for best results.

CORDYLINA

Bold, colorful cordyline comes in a variety of colors, including a glorious purplish-red. Give cordyline a warm, draft-free location with a well-draining potting mix. Feed them weekly and keep the pH of the soil around 6-6.5 for best results.

SCHEFFLERA

Also called the umbrella plant, schefflera leaves are broad and glossy. You can get larger varieties that can sit in a warm corner giving a canopy effect that catches the eye indoors.

Plant schefflera in a rich, loose potting media with moist compost. Fertilize twice a month and keep them in



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bright, indirect light.

PHILODENDRON

These plants are having a moment right now, and there are more varieties available than ever before. There are climbing and self-heading types of philodendrons, depending on where you want the plants. They want medium, indirect light and frequent

watering in summer with less in the colder, darker months.

KENTIA PALM

Queen Victoria used Kentia palms throughout her residences. Use a fast-draining potting mix, fertilize monthly, and keep your palm in a warm and sunny spot. Let the soil dry between waterings for the best results.

Counting Cacti

Cacti are desert-dwelling plants that appreciate a dry environment, like that in your climate-controlled home. Cacti can also get by on as little as three hours of sun per day and come in a lot of shapes and sizes, some with vibrant blooms.

Here are five kinds of cacti that you can grow indoors.

ANGEL WINGS (OPUNTA ALBISPINA)

This member of the prickly pear family grows evenly spaced clusters of hair rather than sharp spines, making them safer for little fingers and pets' tender noses. It grows clusters of pads that get no larger than two feet tall but, over time, can spread to more than five feet. Pale yellow blooms are followed by red, edible fruits on plants that get full sun.

AFRICAN MILK TREE (EUPHORBIA TRIGONA)

Also called the cathedral plant, this cactus can get more than eight feet tall but is unlikely to pass four feet indoors. Small green leaves grow in between thorns on the ridged stems. Plant it in well-draining soil and water in twice a month for best results. It likes full sun to partial shade.

OLD LADY CACTUS (MAMMILLARIA HAHNIANA)

These round balls of fluff get around 10 inches tall and feature white hairs and spines.

Healthy cacti will grow a crown of pink blooms. Like other cacti, it prefers well-draining soil and bright, even light. Water it every two weeks to once a month.

CHRISTMAS CACTUS

We've all seen these around the holidays, but they're easy keepers all year. They have smooth, segmented leaves and bloom tubular flowers in red, pink, orange and white. It comes from the Brazilian rain forest, not the desert, so they need regular waterings that allow the soil to dry in between.

Christmas cacti appreciate diffused light like they would find at home and, if you can expose them to cooler temperatures as winter approaches, you can even get them to rebloom.

BARREL CACTUS (FEROCACTUS)

These little guys get about eight to 10 feet outdoors and are covered in long, rigid spines. Give it as much sun as you can and as little water and you please. Pot them in a loose, sandy potting mix and allow the soil to dry between waterings.



Christmas Cactus

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Old Lady Cactus

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Soil 101

Successful houseplants start with the roots and with the type of soil you nestle those roots in.

There are lots of different kinds of soil out there, and even more amending mediums you can add. Many commercial mixes add fertilizers and other amendments straight into the soil, which is important when it comes time to feed your plants. Too much fertilizer can be deadly. Here's a guide to understanding what's in your potting soil.

COMPOST AND MANURE

These ingredients contain vital plant nutrients and microorganisms. They also help the soil retain water. If you're looking for well-draining soil for cacti and succulents, avoid too much of this. But make sure you have it in abundance for your tropicals.

PEAT MOSS OR COIR

This lightweight filler acts like a sponge, sucking up water and releasing it to your plants' roots when they need it most. Avoid mixes with super-absorbent polymers if you can. These are made with petroleum products that you may not want in your home.

PUMICE AND PERLITE

Volcanic rocks like these increase drainage and soil aeration. Your cactus soil is



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probably full of it. Vermiculite is another popular additive that does something similar.

GARDEN SOIL

Do not use garden soil in your container gardens. This soil is too dense and heavy and, if you pull it from an existing garden, it may also

contain pests that will harm your houseplants. Instead, opt for potting soil from your local nursery or garden center.

MIXING YOUR OWN

You may choose to mix your own soils for your plants. That's perfectly fine

and you can find most of the ingredients for a good potting soil at your local nursery or garden center. It's important to use a large container that's been cleaned well to eliminate any spores for fungi and molds and to mix your soil well after each amendment additive and before each use.

If you add fertilizer into your mix, read the instructions for reapplications carefully to make sure you don't overfertilize your houseplants. Store your ready-mixed potting soil in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight. Keep it in an airtight container to keep out pests.