



Suggested Indoor Foliage Plants

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Choosing a houseplant can seem like a simple task when you're at the garden center or greenhouse. But before you make any purchases you should take an inventory of the various light levels around your home. Not only do plants differ in their preference for light, but also not all of the windows in your home are suitable for every plant. Generally you should be able to find plants for the conditions that you have. Listed below are descriptions of some plants for low light, medium light, and high light areas.

Plants for Low Light Areas (a north window, a dark nook, a tabletop)

Chinese Evergreen (*Aglaonema modestum*, *A. commutatum*)

Aglaonemas are highly colorful plants that also have the common name Chinese Evergreen. They are excellent plants for the interior use as a specimen on a table or as floor plants. The leaves are generally a foot long and vary in color from solid green to dark green marked with silver, to almost silver, to cream-yellow. You can grow Chinese evergreen anywhere as long as it is out of full sun. The variegated ones need medium to bright indirect light, slightly more than the solid green ones, to keep the attractive markings. Keep the soil barely moist.

Heart-leaf Philodendron (*Philodendron oxycardium*)

The philodendron group contains a number of different species, but the most common vining one is the heart-leaf philodendron. It has small, glossy, heart-shaped leaves on long trailing stems that can be trained onto a bark pole or other support. This plant will tolerate low light in the middle of the room. Keep the soil evenly moist.

Arrowhead Vine (*Syngonium podophyllum*)

The arrowhead vine, or syngonium, is native to Central America and Mexico. They have three-lobed leaves that vary in color from dark to yellowish-green. Some leaves have dark green borders. Use them on tables or in hanging baskets.

Dumbcane (*Dieffenbachia* species)

There are many varieties of this tough, easy to grow plant. The plants vary in size from 3 to 8 feet. The leaves may be dark, medium, or pale green, yellow, or creamy white. The plant contains an irritating juice that causes swelling in the mouth and throat when eaten (giving the plant its common name). In general, they make striking floor plants. Dieffenbachia tolerate a wide range of light, from dim to bright, but it should be kept out of full sun. Allow the soil to dry between waterings.

Devil's Ivy - Pothos (*Scindapsus aureus*)

The devil's ivy is often confused with heart-leaf philodendron. The leaves are generally heart-shaped but variegated or marbled with white or yellow. Under high light, the variegation will be more pronounced. Pothos are effective on a small table, trained on a totem pole, or used in a hanging basket. Grow pothos in bright, indirect light or in a low-light situation. You can actually neglect it and water only when the soil is dry.

Mother-in-law-tongue (*Sanseveria trifasciata*)

This is the plant that is practically impossible to kill. It also goes by the name of snake plant. The common form develops long, sword-like, thick, leathery dark green leaves marked with gray or light green bands. Smaller forms with leaves in a rosette are attractive on tables or in dish gardens.

Swedish Ivy (*Plectranthus australis*)

Swedish ivy is a bushy, trailing plant with small, roundish, bright green, waxy, 2-inch leaves. If you grow it in a hanging basket, the stems will cascade 2 to 4 feet over the sides. Under bright light, clusters of small white flowers will bloom on erect stems. Grow in bright light and keep the soil evenly moist. The plant is very easy to propagate from stem cuttings.

Grape Ivy (*Cissus rhombifolia*)

The grape ivy makes an attractive plant for a hanging basket. It has soft brown stems, coiling tendrils similar to grapevines, and glossy-green quilted leaves. Without

support, the stems will grow to about 2 feet before they begin cascading over the sides of the pot. You can also train grape ivy onto a support.

Plants for Medium Light Areas (east window, or away from a south or west window)

Prayer Plant (*Maranta leuconera kerchoveana*)

Prayer plants get their name because of their habit of folding up their leaves at night (to conserve moisture). The leaves vary in color from soft, light green to dark green on the upper surface, and light green and maroon on the undersides, giving them an exotic appearance. Sometimes they produce small, white, flowers with purple stripes. They are attractive on a table, desk, or in a terrarium or dish garden. Give it indirect light and maintain high humidity if possible.

Piggyback Plant (*Tolmiea menziesii*)

This plant is often called “mother of thousands”, for it sends out young plantlets at the base of the mature leaves. The leaves are light green, soft, heart-shaped, and covered with scattered white hairs. Occasionally the plants send out a raceme of tiny flowers. Give the plants bright direct light and keep the soil evenly moist but not wet. Piggyback is easy to propagate. Simply remove the young plantlets from the mature leaves and root them; peg the plantlets on the runners onto moist potting soil; or take leaf cuttings.

Peace Lily (*Spathiphyllum* species)

Peace lilies are attractive plants with dark green, lance-shaped, ribbed leaves. Intermittently, they produce white flowers that resemble calla lilies. These plants will tolerate low light levels but do better under medium light. Keep the soil evenly moist but not wet. Water only when the soil is dry, just before the leaves wilt. Occasionally the older leaves will turn brown at the edges and then turn yellow.

Weeping Fig (*Ficus benjamina*)

This popular tree with graceful, drooping branches is used as a major tree in mall plantings and as a specimen in homes. The leaves are small, shiny, leathery, and about 2 to 3 inches long. In low light, the plants decline rapidly, so try to provide bright light. If the soil dries out, the leaves tend to drop off in large numbers. Once you find a happy location for this plant, don't move it.

Indian Rubber Plant (*Ficus elastica*)

The Indian-rubber tree or Rubber Plant is an attractive floor plant that grows stiff and tall with large, thick leaves. The leaves emerge bronze-colored from bright red sheaths and grow up to 6 inches wide and 12 inches long. While the plants are usually sold 2 to 4 feet tall, they eventually reach ceiling height and lose some of their lower leaves over time. Rubber plants need bright light and moist but not soggy soil. Some leaves will naturally yellow and drop. If the plant becomes too large, it can be air layered. After removing the rooted top, continue to water the 'parent plant' and it will sprout new growth.

Schefflera (*Brassaia actinophylla*)

The schefflera or Australian umbrella tree is a popular, durable houseplant. It grows slowly to a height of six feet or more, so it is useful as a floor plant or small tree. The leaves are palmate, glossy, and generally at the ends of the branches. It likes bright light but should not be in direct sun. Allow the soil to dry between waterings. When the plants get too large, you can shorten it by air layering.

Plants for High Light Areas (a south or west window)

Dracena (*Dracaena* sp.)

Dracena's come in all sizes and colors. They are easy to grow and survive adverse conditions. They grow slow and make excellent accents in the home, often growing too large for the location. One of the most popular dracenas is the corn plant, *Dracaena fragrans massangeana*, that looks like...corn. It has arching leaves of green with a chartreuse-yellow band down the center. Another attractive dracena is *D. marginata*, which has very narrow, slightly arching leaves of green edged in red. As the plant grows, it tends to lose the lower leaves. Grow all dracenas in bright light out of direct sunlight. Keep the soil evenly moist but not constantly wet.

Spider Plant (*Chlorophytum comosum*)

The spider plant is a favorite among many gardeners. The leaves are produced in graceful arching masses that may be up to 2 feet long with a broad, white stripe down the center. Small white flowers are borne on long stalks that arise from the leaves. After the flowers fade, young plants form at the end of the stalks, giving the plant its real appeal. Spider plants look best when allowed to cascade over the sides of the container. Give them bright light and allow the soil to dry out between waterings.

English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)

There are over 40 forms of English ivy, all with different leaf shapes from nearly round to strongly lobed and pointed. They make excellent plants for tables and hanging baskets, and can be trained onto wire forms for attractive topiaries. There are many variations in leaf sizes, shapes, and colors. The foliage can be three-, five-, or seven-lobed, dark green or variegated. English ivy should not be confused with Grape Ivy or German Ivy. These plants are called 'ivy' but the leaves are different. English ivy likes bright but not direct sunlight. Keep the soil evenly moist.

Jade Plant (*Crassula argentea*)

This branching plant looks like a small tree. The leaves are thick, fleshy, rounded, and glossy. Although the green form is most common, you can find jade plants with variegated leaves. Mature plants in ideal locations will form tiny pinkish white clusters of flowers in the fall. Jade does best in full sun but will tolerate bright, indirect light. Since this is a succulent, water it only when the soil becomes dry. In the winter, water only enough to keep the leaves from shriveling.

Cacti and Succulents (various species)

The cactus family is so large, there are sizes and types to fit any taste. Cacti have become popular as houseplants because can almost be neglected. Cacti prefer a soil that is porous and well-drained. During the summer, water them about every two weeks. During the winter, water them only enough to keep them from shriveling (maybe only once a month). If they are over-watered, they will rot. Two popular groups of plants within this category are the holiday cacti – Christmas cactus (*Schlumbergera*) and Thanksgiving cactus (*Zygocactus*). Both have flat, fleshy stems and flowers of pink, red, or salmon.

Wandering Jew (*Tradescantia* or *Zebrinus* species)

Wandering Jews are robust plants with bright colorations. There are numerous varieites with numerous markings: green with purple undersides, green and silver with purple undersides; leaves with blue, red, or brown. Grow in bright, filtered light. Keep the soil evenly moist but not soggy. They are susceptible to root rot, so be sure the potting soil and container drain well. Pinch plants as they become leggy.