



# PLANTOPEDIA

The Definitive Guide to Houseplants

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# Monstera deliciosa

COMMON NAME SWISS CHEESE PLANT

An absolute stalwart of the indoor plant world, you're sure to find a *Monstera deliciosa* in the collection of any indoor gardener worth their salt. A tropical beauty hailing from parts of southern Mexico through to southern Panama, it makes a graphic and decidedly lush statement in any space.

CARE LEVEL

novice

LIGHT

bright, indirect

WATER

moderate

SOIL

well-draining

HUMIDITY

medium

PROPAGATION

stem cuttings

GROWTH HABIT

climbing

POSITION

floor

TOXICITY

toxic

Its solid, heart-shaped juvenile leaves are beautiful in their own right, but it's as the plant matures that those fabulous fenestrations for which the Swiss cheese plant is known come into their own.

Apart from its good looks, this houseplant is one low-maintenance monster. In a position enjoying bright, indirect light and with a consistent watering schedule (allowing the top 5 cm/2 in of soil to dry out in between drinks), *M. deliciosa* will flourish. Be sure to give it room to grow as these guys get big, fast. A solid stake is useful for wrangling *Monstera deliciosa*, giving it much-needed support on which to climb.

It can be propagated from a stem cutting with a leaf node and aerial root (ensuring that it includes the dormant bud), which is good to know for when your plant requires taming or outgrows its home.

While its Latin name is derived from the 'delicious' fruit the plant bears in the wild which tastes like a mix of banana and pineapple, indoor conditions rarely promote fruit development. There's no loss, though, when you have those glorious leaves to admire. Be sure to keep the large surface area of the leaves dust free with a regular wipe down or a shower every now and then. Misting will also be appreciated.



# Calathea lietzei

COMMON NAME CALATHEA WHITE FUSION

The *Calathea lietzei* and its cultivars are truly striking, but in return they require some special attention.

CARE LEVEL  
green thumb

LIGHT  
bright, indirect

WATER  
moderate

SOIL  
well-draining

HUMIDITY  
high

PROPAGATION  
division

GROWTH HABIT  
clumping

POSITION  
tabletop

TOXICITY  
pet friendly

For this Latin American beauty, high humidity goes with the territory and anything less will result in brown edges marring that fabulous foliage. If you're really serious, investing in a humidifier is your best bet, but frequent misting and sitting your plant on a pebble tray with water is the next best thing.

Here we feature the most common cultivar, *Calathea lietzei* 'white fusion', whose leaves look as if they have been painted by a master with strokes of white and light and dark green, with purple-pink undersides.

The calathea white fusion can handle

slightly lower-light conditions, but to maintain the variegation for which this plant is so adored, ensure it enjoys bright, indirect light avoiding direct sun. Keep the soil consistently moist, watering when just the top layer has dried out; conversely, be sure to avoid overwatering. It's all about getting the balance right, which you will learn as you get to know your plant.

Although more fickle than some other calatheas, the white fusion does have the ability to come back from a little mistreatment. Simply cut off any damaged leaves and return it to a regular watering and misting schedule.

# Goeppertia orbifolia

COMMON NAME PEACOCK PLANT syn: *Calathea orbifolia*

Large, bright green foliage with silver stripes that increase in size with each new leaf, the *Goeppertia orbifolia* is a true show-off, just like its namesake bird the peacock.



CARE LEVEL  
green thumb

LIGHT  
low-moderate

WATER  
moderate

SOIL  
moisture-retaining

HUMIDITY  
high

PROPAGATION  
division

GROWTH HABIT  
clumping

POSITION  
tabletop

TOXICITY  
pet friendly

We love it for these striking leaves and the fresh, graphic vibe it brings to any indoor jungle, but keep in mind that these good looks don't necessarily come easy. This diva demands high humidity akin to the levels it's used to in its natural habitat, and it's safe to say that this is the most crucial care factor for this plant. Be sure to keep it clear of cold draughts and air-conditioning units, and close to a source of humidity whether that be your trusty mister, a pebble tray filled with water and/or grouped with lots of other humidity-loving plant pals.

Hailing from the forest floor, this gorgeous plant is tolerant of lower-light conditions, but it will thrive in bright, indirect sunlight. Direct afternoon rays will damage the leaves, so keep clear of

windowsills. Use filtered water where possible and be sure to keep the soil relatively moist but never soggy, and always remove any excess water from saucers. Fertilise every fortnight with a half-strength liquid fertiliser during spring and summer, and use a damp cloth to wipe the leaves clean. In general, we suggest avoiding shine sprays, but particularly in this instance as the foliage is sensitive. Instead, opt for horticultural oil or eco-oil for the same glossy result without the nasties.

*Goeppertia orbifolia* can be propagated every couple of years. In spring, gently divide the root system into two plants and then immediately repot both into fresh potting mix. Keep your new plants warm and moist and soon enough you'll have grown a *G. orbifolia* for every room.



# *Philodendron bipennifolium*

COMMON NAME HORSEHEAD PHILODENDRON

If you're looking for a philodendron a little out of leftfield, look no further than *P. bipennifolium*. Large, fiddle-shaped leaves that are glossy and green are what gives the horsehead or fiddle-leaf philodendron its common moniker.

CARE LEVEL

novice

LIGHT

bright, indirect

WATER

moderate

SOIL

well-draining

HUMIDITY

medium

PROPAGATION

stem cuttings

GROWTH HABIT

climbing

POSITION

bookshelf or stand

TOXICITY

toxic

This plant is known as a hemi-epiphyte, meaning it starts life in the soil before attaching to a tree and climbing towards the top of the rainforest canopy with its long stem and the assistance of aerial roots. It is for this reason that this fast-growing tropical does best when supported by a solid stake or totem.

Originating in the tropical rainforests of southern Brazil, Argentina and Bolivia, horsehead philodendrons require bright, indirect light to thrive. Water deeply

before allowing water to drain away and allow the top 5 cm (2 in) of soil to dry out before watering again. Keeping the large foliage dust free facilitates good photosynthesis and keeps this houseplant happy. Repotting every couple of years to refresh the soil is recommended, but you won't need to increase the pot size each time as these guys like to be snug in their container. As with all philodendrons, they are considered toxic so keep away from pets and small children.



# *Philodendron tatei* ssp *melanochlorum* 'Congo'

COMMON NAME CONGO PHILODENDRON

This *Philodendron* cultivar has a self-heading growth habit that, much like the *Philodendron erubescens* on page XX, grows outwards and upwards, peaking at about 60 cm (25 in) in both height and width.

CARE LEVEL

novice

LIGHT

bright, indirect

WATER

moderate

SOIL

well-draining

HUMIDITY

moderate

PROPAGATION

stem cuttings

GROWTH HABIT

clumping

POSITION

covered balcony

TOXICITY

toxic

Sold in a range of colours, it's one of several cultivars of *Philodendron* that has been recently developed by growers.

The 'rojo Congo' (pictured here) displays striking large leaves that emerge a bright red, almost copper colour, maturing to a deep burgundy and then finally to a very dark green. Its stems and petioles (leaf stalks) on the other hand retain a rich red hue. The 'Congo green', as its name suggests, sports glossy all-green foliage but with the same

smooth-edged, oval-shaped leaves.

Caring for these hardy and tolerant philodendrons is easy-as. Apart from extreme cold they will withstand a variety of conditions and, as such, work well both indoors or on a covered balcony. Bright, indirect light (lots of it for the 'rojo Congo') is best. The Congo will handle periods of drought, but ideally water once the top 5 cm (2 in) of soil is dry. Keep in mind that if exposed to lots of bright light your Congo will need to be watered more regularly.

# Ficus elastica

COMMON NAME RUBBER PLANT

With robust, lustrous leaves and the capacity to grow nice and large, the *Ficus elastica* is one strapping specimen of fig. With an upright growth habit which makes it well suited to a position on the floor, mature specimens in particular make a strong statement in a bright corner or on a covered balcony.

CARE LEVEL

novice

LIGHT

bright, indirect

WATER

moderate

SOIL

well-draining

HUMIDITY

medium

PROPAGATION

stem cuttings

GROWTH HABIT

upright

POSITION

floor

TOXICITY

toxic

This hardy fig is low maintenance and will even let a little neglect slide. It will communicate its thirst by wilting, and its leaves may also curl after long periods of drought. Avoid getting to this point by implementing a regular watering schedule. A good soak roughly once a week should do the trick, but as long as the top 5 cm (2 in) of soil have dried out, you are good to water again. The rubber plant's wide leaves gather dust easily, so wipe them down regularly with a damp cloth. A regular spray of white or neem oil will keep the leaves looking super glossy with the added benefit of keeping pests at

bay. Avoid hot and cold draughts, as the rubber plant can be sensitive to drastic changes in temperature. As with all figs, the sap can cause irritation on contact as well as if ingested, so keep clear of pesky pets and curious little ones.

With a range of spectacular variegated options also available – from mottled cream, green and blush-coloured 'tineke', to the moodier red tones of the 'ruby' – *Ficus elastica* can add colour and pizzazz to your indoor jungle. Keep in mind that to maintain the stunning patterning on variegated foliage, these guys require higher light requirements than their

*Ficus elastica* 'robusta'





# *Caladium lindenii*

COMMON NAME WHITE VEIN ARROW LEAF

A true showstopper in every sense of the word, the fabulous foliage on this Colombian native is gloriously graphic. Its large leaves, thin and leathery in texture and shaped like arrowheads, are yellowy-green and broadly veined with striking white.

CARE LEVEL  
green thumb

LIGHT  
bright, indirect

WATER  
high

SOIL  
well-draining

HUMIDITY  
high

PROPAGATION  
division

GROWTH HABIT  
clumping

POSITION  
tabletop

TOXICITY  
toxic

You will sometimes find this *Caladium* labelled as *Xanthosoma lindenii*, even though it was reclassified in the early 1980s. It seems old habits die hard.

Warm bright but indirect light and plenty of humidity will encourage healthy growth that will see this herbaceous shrub form a dense clump reaching 60–90 cm (2–3 feet) in height. A monthly feed with half-strength liquid fertiliser will further optimise growth, and regular misting of the foliage is advised. Rich, moist, but well-draining potting mix is your best bet, which can be achieved by adding some coco peat to your regular potting mix.

*Caladium lindenii* has a tendency towards

the dramatic, particularly when it comes to overwatering, but it can also collapse when dehydrated, so getting the balance right is key. In cooler climates, it will often take the winter off growing, and in cold climates it may go completely dormant. In these instances, you should reduce watering almost completely until you see signs of growth as the weather warms up.

Thanks to their tuberous roots, the *Caladium lindenii* is incredibly easy to propagate by means of division. Just be careful handling the plant as it can cause skin irritation in some people. You'll also need to keep it away from curious pets and small humans.



# Peperomia polybotrya

COMMON NAME RAINDROP PEPEROMIA

Named for its raindrop-shaped glossy green leaves, the raindrop, or coin-leaf, peperomia is one of the larger species within the *Peperomia* genus, reaching (not so) lofty heights of about 30 cm (12 in).

CARE LEVEL

novice

LIGHT

bright, indirect

WATER

low-moderate

SOIL

well-draining

HUMIDITY

moderate

PROPAGATION

leaf + stem cuttings

GROWTH HABIT

clumping

POSITION

tabletop

TOXICITY

pet friendly

Native to tropical South America, the raindrop peperomia often grows epiphytically in the wild, without an extensive root structure. The semi-succulent leaves and stems store water well, so indoors it only requires a low to moderate amount of water, letting the majority of the soil dry out between drinks.

Small inflorescence produce fleeting sweet-smelling flowers, which can be snipped off at the base once they are spent. Because of its semi-succulent nature, the raindrop peperomia doesn't have high humidity needs, but do try and mimic its natural tropical environment with a regular spritz, ensuring there is adequate air flow so the leaves and soil don't stay damp.

*Peperomia polybotrya* is a slow grower, but like most *Peperomia*, it propagates easily via leaf and stem cuttings. In spring, neatly cut a leaf with some petiole attached and allow to dry out for 24 hours before gently sticking into potting mix, petiole end in. Although unlikely to need regular repotting, raindrop peperomias tend to clump (either due to multiple buried nodes or clumping resulting from tissue culture), so the plant will widen over time, with extra branches expanding from the base. For optimal growth, fertilise your plant with half-strength, well-balanced liquid fertiliser every month or so during spring and summer, but lay off during the cooler seasons.



# *Alocasia reginula*

COMMON NAME BLACK VELVET ALOCASIA

One of the sweeter, smaller alocasias going around, this little black beauty has velutinous leaves lined with silvery veins. The black velvet alocasia is part of a special and small gang of plants with near-black colouring. It joins the likes of *Zamioculcas zamiifolia* ‘raven’ and *Colocasia esculenta* ‘black magic’ in this seductively selective crew.



CARE LEVEL  
green thumb

LIGHT  
bright, indirect

WATER  
moderate

SOIL  
well-draining

HUMIDITY  
medium

PROPAGATION  
offsets/plantlets

GROWTH HABIT  
clumping

POSITION  
tabletop

TOXICITY  
toxic

Native to Southeast Asia, the *Alocasia reginula* grows terrestrially on the jungle floor. Its leaves feel slightly fleshier than those of its relatives, having evolved to tolerate slightly drier conditions. As such, it requires a little less water than other alocasias, and is best suited to being watered deeply, but infrequently, allowing at least 5 cm (2 in) of soil to dry out between drinks. Good ventilation is key, so ensure you crack a window and don't jam it too closely among your other plants. While the black velvet alocasia can grow to 60 cm (24 in) tall in perfect conditions, it will more likely stay a squat 20 cm (8 in) indoors. It doesn't need to be repotted regularly, but when you do, make sure you only increase your pot size slightly; otherwise you risk the roots becoming waterlogged by too much potting mix. Treat this beauty right and she will reward you with gorgeous foliage year after year.

*Dracaena trifasciata* 'moonshine'



# Dracaena trifasciata

COMMON NAME SNAKE PLANT Syn: *Sansevieria trifasciata*

It may be a struggle to wrap your head around the fact that a number of *Sansevieria* species have recently been reclassified as members of the *Dracaena* genus. But as they say, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, and this is certainly true of the *Dracaena trifasciata*.

CARE LEVEL

novice

LIGHT

bright, indirect

WATER

low

SOIL

coarse + sandy

HUMIDITY

low

PROPAGATION

division

GROWTH HABIT

rosette

POSITION

bookshelf or stand

TOXICITY

mildly toxic

While its Latin name may have changed, its common names remain the same. It is sometimes, unfavourably, known as mother-in-law's tongue, which references the sharp edges of its lovely upright leaves. We prefer the common name snake plant, and can assure you that this stylish succulent is one serpent you'll be more than happy to have hanging around the house.

NASA has recognised *D. trifasciata* (even if it was named *Sansevieria* at the time) in their Clean Air Study for its incredible ability to remove four of the five toxins commonly found in our homes. Add to that its ability to tolerate lower-light conditions and low water needs and you can see why the snake plant is such an enduring

favourite among indoor gardeners.

Although this low-maintenance beauty needs little attention, be sure not to ignore it entirely. Good drainage is key and a potting mix specific to cacti and succulents will work well. Allow the soil to fully dry out between drinks, and always avoid the leaves when watering to prevent liquid pooling at the plant's centre which can cause rot.

There are a number of lovely cultivars in a range of colours and patterning, but we have a particular soft spot for the delightful *D. trifasciata* 'moonshine' (pictured here), which features foliage in the dreamiest silvery-green, but retains all the low-maintenance vibes synonymous with the snake plant.



# *Adiantum aethiopicum*

COMMON NAME COMMON MAIDENHAIR FERN

As its common name suggests, this is probably the plant you think of when you hear the name Maidenhair fern, with its delicate fronds and wiry black stems.

CARE LEVEL  
green thumb

LIGHT  
bright, indirect

WATER  
moderate–high

SOIL  
well-draining

HUMIDITY  
high

PROPAGATION  
division

GROWTH HABIT  
clumping

POSITION  
bookshelf or stand

TOXICITY  
pet friendly

*Adiantum aethiopicum* is native to Africa, New Zealand and Australia, and it is one of only a small number of Australian natives that thrive indoors (joining the likes of the kentia palm, native river mint and staghorn fern). In the wild the maidenhair fern lives along creeks and in other moisture-rich environments, so you'll need to keep the soil moist at all times and water as soon as the surface of the potting mix has dried out; otherwise its leaves will crisp before your eyes. It also likes high humidity, so keep your plant away from heating and air-conditioning units, draughts and dry spots.

*Adiantum aethiopicum* gets a bad rap for being very finicky and we've certainly had

our battles in the past, but with the right care it can thrive and live a long, happy life. It's a fast grower with rhizomes that spread in creeping clumps, and elegantly arching light-green fronds that can reach 50 cm (20 in) in height. Pruning can keep your maidenhair fern tidy and prevent it from becoming too leggy. Cut off any dead foliage at the base of the stem with a sharp pair of secateurs. A good trim at the end of winter will also promote new growth come spring.

The maidenhair fern can be prone to scale so keep an eye out for any invading pests and act quickly to remove them. Thankfully, along with all true ferns, it is safe for pets.

# Curio radicans

COMMON NAME STRING OF BEANS Syn: *Senecio radicans*

Less finicky than its fellow 'string of' pals, *Curio radicans* is a lovely trailing succulent native to South Africa and found thriving in both arid and tropical environments. They love warm climes and grow quickly during spring and summer.

CARE LEVEL

novice

LIGHT

bright, indirect

WATER

low

SOIL

coarse + sandy

HUMIDITY

none

PROPAGATION

stem cuttings

GROWTH HABIT

trailing

POSITION

bookshelf or stand

TOXICITY

toxic

Plump, succulent, powdery, curved leaves are reminiscent of beans, bananas and fish hooks (inspiring their many common names) and are around 2-3 cm (around 1 in) long. Attached to long tendrils, they cascade attractively over their pot's edge and add a tonne of texture to an indoor garden. They look great on a shelf or in a hanging planter, and their small white flowers, which appear throughout the year, will reward your senses with a strong cinnamon scent.

They are semi-drought tolerant once established, but you'll do best to water

your *C. radicans* once most of the potting mix has dried out. Wrinkling stems and leaves is a sign of serious thirst, be sure to water before such signs of stress.

String of beans propagate easily so if your plant starts to look a little bald on top, take a stem cutting a pop it back in the potting mix to thicken it up. Fertilise monthly during the warmer seasons, holding off once the weather cools. Their shallow root systems mean regular repotting is not required, just ensure their pot helps balance the weight of their long stems.





# *Aloe polyphylla*

COMMON NAME SPIRAL ALOE

This seriously dramatic Aloe is endemic to Lesotho, the tiny kingdom within South Africa, where it is considered a threatened species. Its juicy, succulent leaves spiral out beautifully from a central rosette once the plant reaches maturity.

CARE LEVEL

novice

LIGHT

bright, indirect-  
full sun

WATER

moderate

SOIL

coarse + sandy

HUMIDITY

low

PROPAGATION

seed

GROWTH HABIT

rosette

POSITION

table

TOXICITY

toxic

Grey-green in colour, the leaves have a serrated edge and a spiky brown tip. Being stemless, this is a compact plant, but it makes a great statement indoors with its bold geometry. Keep in mind that it requires a little extra work than some of its peers, but if you're lucky enough to get your hands on one, you'll want to treat it right.

Unusually for a succulent, the spiral aloe has moderate water needs, which evolved as the plant adapted to growing on cooler, wetter mountainsides where it also learned to tolerate a little frost and snow. When watering, try to aim for the

potting mix rather than the centre of the plant, to ensure that water doesn't get trapped among the leaves. In addition, when potting your plant, angle the *Aloe polyphylla* slightly so it's not facing straight up. This will help to prevent water getting stuck in the top of the plant and has the added bonus of allowing you to get a better view of that wonderful spiral.

Fertilise with a half-strength liquid fertiliser in the growing seasons, and keep your plant tidy by cutting off old leaves at the base. Always be careful whenever you handle your spiral plant as its spikes can do you an injury.