

Winter officially arrived two days ago. The weather forecast for the balance of this month, including January and February, is more than likely freezing temperatures and darkness— two weather conditions I strongly dislike. These conditions are definitely not suitable for growing plants. The many plants I had growing outdoors on my deck have long since died, except those that I saved by carting them indoors.



Three of those plants now stand in my office. The overhead lights do not illuminate on a daily basis since I am only at work on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Fortunately, my office has a window. When the overhead lights are off, I leave my curtains open so natural light enters. The three plants are Chinese evergreen, a jade and a Ming aralia. Thus far, I am pleased with their performances and I share with you a little information about each.

Chinese evergreen is a highly decorative plant. Also known as *Aglaonema*, this hearty plant originated in swamps and wetlands of Asia. It is one of the easiest and most popular houseplants. It is an excellent foliage plant. *Aglaonema* is slow growing. It has large, narrow, striped, oval leaves on short stems. Considered a low-light plant, *Aglaonema* does well indoors,

especially if a window is available. Although heavy watering is needed in the summer, during the winter it prefers much less. The number one rule with *Aglaonema* is keeping it warm and moist.

*Crassula ovata*, more commonly called jade plant, is also an easy plant to grow. A jade plant has thick, glossy, succulent leaves. The tree-like structure of a jade plant sets it apart from other succulents. With proper care, a jade can grow to a height of two to three feet. It, too, is among the easiest houseplants to grow. One of the most important care features for a jade plant is to make sure that it is watered properly. Never let a jade plant dry out completely. Also, avoid watering a jade plant too often. This can cause root rot. It is best to water a jade plant when the top of soil is dry to the touch. Another important aspect of its care is how much light it needs. It needs full sun in order to grow properly. If it does not have full sun, it may become stunted and leggy. For this reason, my jade sits directly in front of the window. A jade can be propagated easily from either a stem or leaf cutting.

Ming aralia is the common name for *Polyscias fruticosa*. At first glance, this plant looks fussy. Its stems carry compound leaves made up of several leaflets, giving it a fancy, finely cut foliage — an elegant quality one might expect from a high-maintenance plant. Fortunately, this tropical native is extremely adaptable to most homes. Place it full sun -- or indirect light. It is quite happy just about anywhere. An aralia prefers warmth. It dislikes cold temperatures. It performs best when grown in a small pot because aralias grow best when their roots are confined. Overwatering can easily kill a Ming aralia; thus, it should be watered similarly to the manner I described when watering jade plants. Always grow a Ming in a pot with a drainage hole.

All gardeners know that light, water and temperature are the basic requirements needed to grow plants successfully. I am reasonably confident that I am providing my plants all three requirements although I

am certain they are receiving less light than when they were growing outdoors on our deck.

Although winter has now officially arrived, the plants in my office are doing well. My goal is to keep them that way. With each passing cold, dark winter's day, these living plants continue to remind me of warmer and brighter days ahead.