



## Gift Plants for Gardeners

If you have a gardener on your gift list, a new houseplant is a great way to brighten up the dark winter days. Here are some suggestions to help you match the gift plant you choose to the expertise level of your gardener.

### Beginning Gardeners



**African Violet**, *Saintpaulia ionantha*, is a small plant with fuzzy, dark green or variegated leaves and clusters of flowers. The flowers may have a single layer of petals or multiple layers, with flower colors including white, pink, lavender, purple and bi-color. They thrive in any bright window and require little care other than occasional watering. African violets are very common; you can find them at most grocery floral shops.

**Amaryllis**, *Hippeastrum hybrida*, are very showy blooming plants with long, strap-like leaves and tall flower stalks topped by a cluster of large, trumpet-shaped flowers. Flower color ranges from white to red. They are grown from large bulbs and frequently gift packages that include the bulb, pot and soil media can be purchased together. Choose the largest bulb you can find to ensure the most flower stalks possible. Put the bulb in the soil, with half the bulb above ground, water, and place it in a bright window. It's that simple.

**Bird of Paradise**, *Strelitzia spp.*, is a wonderful, unique houseplant and it's easy enough for even the average gardener to grow. Leaves originate from the base crown, shooting up grayish-green petioles topped by narrowly oblong leaves. Plants required high light and average indoor temperatures.

**Cast Iron Plant**, *Aspidistra elatior*, a plant with a suitable common name and a very durable houseplant. It was popular during the Victoria era, enduring cold, dimly lit rooms and fumes from burning coal. This plant does well under medium to very low light conditions and medium to cool temperatures. In fact, practically the only way to kill it is by overwatering or placing it in a high temperature location, which makes the plant susceptible to spider mite invasion. Cast Iron Plant has dark green, broadly sword-shaped, leathery leaves and reaches a height of 3'. It is a slow growing plant, yet one that thrives on neglect and makes a nice green accent for a dark corner.

**Chinese Evergreen**, *Aglaonema modestum*, is a small, bushy plant with sword-shape, variegated leaves about 2' in height. It grows best under medium light and temperatures, but will tolerate low light. Many cultivars are available with different leaf colors, including silvery-green leaves and dark, forest green leaves.



**Pothos**, or devil's ivy, is often confused with philodendron, although botanical name it's known as *Scindapsus aureus*. Its leaves are also heart-shaped, but are usually mottled with yellow or white. The plant is grown in hanging baskets, as a small pot plant, or on an upright support called a "totem". Pothos is one of the easiest houseplants to grow, performing well from very low light to direct sun. Water as needed to prevent wilting, and avoid keeping the soil continually wet. Trim the vines back occasionally to prevent them from growing too long, and maintain the plant's

bushiness. That's all it takes to keep this plant happy and healthy- it couldn't be much easier.

### Intermediate Gardeners

**Balfour Aralia**, *Polyscias balfouriana*, is sometimes called Dinnerplate Aralia because of the large, 1 ½" wide, round leaflets. Older plants develop woody stems to support the delicate, attractive foliage. The plant requires bright light and temperatures no lower than 60 degrees, especially in winter. Mature plants can be 3-4' in height. Water thoroughly and allow the soil to dry slightly between waterings. An interesting relative is *Polyscias fruticosa* or Ming Aralia. Very similar to Balfour aralia, but with lacy, fern-like foliage.



**Bird's Nest Fern**, *Asplenium nidus*, a member of the spleenwort family is an easy and interesting houseplant. The 12-18" long, light green, wavy leaves are sword-like with a brown midrib on the underside. The plant requires medium light and normal room temperatures with extra humidity. Water frequently during the summer months, but keep the soil barely moist during winter. It is much easier to grow than Boston fern, but with a very different look.

**Tropical hibiscus**, *H. rosa-sinensis*, has showy large, brightly colored, yellow, red, white or orange flowers are a wonderful sight in the middle of winter. This hibiscus is not winterhardy outside in Nebraska, but if given enough light will bloom year round indoors. They require very bright light or direct sun and temperatures above 55° F. Plants can get large, reaching 5-6', so require space and regular pruning. Watch out for spider mites and whiteflies.

**Dracaena reflexa**, is an attractive, reliable houseplant for medium to low light. The dark green, 3-4" long, sword-like leaves are produced on woody stems resulting in a bushy, 3-4' plant. Easy to grow under most home conditions, reflexa is has clean, uncluttered lines for a nice, large accent houseplant. Several other species of Dracena can also be grown indoors including *D. deremensis* 'Warneckii' with green and white



streaked leaves, and *D. marginata* with 12-15" long, slender leaves on woody trunks. Both are very easy to grow indoors, but be careful not to overwater which causes root and stem rot.

**Moth Orchid**, *Phalaenopsis* hybrid, has beautiful exotic flowers, but is one of the easiest orchids to grow. Provide bright, but indirect sunlight from a north or east window. Daytime temperature should be 70-80° F, with 10 degrees cooler at night. Cool nighttime temperatures in fall, 55-60° F, help initiate flower bud development. Moth orchids grow in a bark medium that should be kept evenly moist. Fertilize monthly with an orchid fertilizer or half-strength of a general purpose fertilizer when plants are blooming or actively growing.



**Natal lily**, *Clivia miniata*, is a member of the Amaryllis family and is a native of South Africa. The foliage resembles that of the common amaryllis, with long, strap-shaped leaves. However, clivia is grown for its showy flowers, which are small versions of amaryllis blossoms in dark scarlet-orange with a yellow throat, clustered atop a thick, fleshy stalk. Plants require bright light and average room temperatures. They are relatively easy to grow, but need a 6-8 week rest period in the winter.

### For the Experienced Green Thumb

Sometimes called **peacock plant**, *Calathea roseopicta* is a very attractive small houseplant with dark burgundy-green leaves, having silvery markings on the upper surface and rosy-purple on the underside. The leaves are large and round, up to 8" across and the mature height of the plant is 8-12". The plant requires bright light, but no direct sun, cool 60-70° F degree temperatures and extra humidity. Water the plant generously in summer, but allow it to dry out more in winter. Getting the growing conditions just right is the tricky part, especially the extra humidity, otherwise plants get margin or leaf tip scorch.

Also popular during the holidays **Gardenia**, *G. jasminoides*, has beautiful, glossy, dark green foliage topped by wonderfully fragrant, large, white flowers. A truly beautiful houseplant, however, they can be temperamental to grow and require the expert touch. Provide bright or direct sun and temperatures no colder than 60° F. Night temperatures of 60-65° F are required for flower bud formation. Keep plants evenly moist. Watch out for spider mites, mealybugs and white flies.

### Your Suggestions are Welcome!

Is there a lawn and gardening topic you would like to learn more about? Sarah Browning is an Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension and can be contacted by phone 402 441-7180, by mail at 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE 68528: or by e-mail [sarah.browning@unl.edu](mailto:sarah.browning@unl.edu).



**Sarah Browning**

*Extension Educator*

Nebraska Extension

In Lancaster County

444 Cherrycreek Rd, Ste A, Lincoln, 68528-1591

402 441 7180