

# Plant Wise

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## Houseplants

It's that time of year. Our attention to plants has moved from outside to indoors. You have moved all your houseplants that enjoyed the summer outside, back to their home inside! Your summer purchases of hibiscus plants are far too beautiful to leave out to die, so you have also brought them into your home.

Houseplants are now our focus. They bring life to our homes, adding beauty and a comfort that is hard to describe. We talk to them as if they understand, and like a pet, they depend on us for food, water and proper care.

### Hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*)

A hibiscus plant will last for decades, producing papery blooms over a period of months each year. Blooms, however will last no more than 2 days. Hibiscus is one of the most reliable indoor flowering plants. Hibiscus come in many colors, pinks, yellows, oranges and reds. Two types of blooms, singles and doubles.



If you have brought your hibiscus in from being outside all summer, you will notice extreme leaf drop. The plant is adjusting by ridding it's self of strong sun leaves to more subtle low light leaves. Indoors, place in a high light (southern exposure) window in winter, but medium to light (indirect light) the rest of the year. Keep the soil evenly moist, especially during blooming. Hibiscus like high

humidity. If you have buds fall off, raise your humidity more. Avoid drafts and try to maintain a steady temperature. Feed every week during active growth and flowering. Prune back after blooming ends and start a dormant period by watering less and stopping feedings.



Whiteflies are the most common problem with hibiscus. If you have had it outside all summer, treat it before you bring it indoors for the winter. To kill whiteflies, always start with a strong water blast with a spray hose. Do it once every week to scatter the pests. Once the population scatters, spray soapy water, insecticidal soap, neem oil, or horticultural oil over the plant, especially coat underside of the leaves. If you still have problems after you have brought it inside, place the plant in your shower or tub and continue treating it. There are also hardy hibiscus that you can plant outdoors that will survive the Iowa winters. It is slower to come up in the spring than most plants, so give it some time before panicking. Some hardy varieties have dinner plate size blooms and die back to the ground each winter, while others are shrub like and have small blooms, like "Rose of Sharon".

### Coleus (*Coleus*)

Also called Flame Nettle, Painted Leaves or Painted Nettle, is another plant that is commonly used outdoors but can be brought in and used as a

houseplant. Coleus comes in a multitude of colors and color patterns. It will thrive indoors with minimal care. Place the plant in high bright light for full foliage coloration. You can control the colorization by moving the plant to different lighting positions. Keep the soil moist and mist frequently or raise humidity.



Feed every 14 days during active growth. Pinch the plant back to create bushy plants. Do not let it bloom, pinch off all blossom stems, just as you would if it were outdoors.

Check your plants often for mealy bugs, as they love the moisture and humidity. If you need to treat the plant, put it in your shower and treat by spraying with soapy water or insecticidal soap.

**Parlor Palm** (*Chamaedorea elegans*)

This is known as the good luck palm. A slow growing plant that sprouts fronds up to 3 feet in length. Plant in a deep pot using porous soil that drains freely. Allow the soil to dry between watering. Mist every day, especially during hot weather. Feed once a month with a diluted mixture.



Parlor Palms like medium indirect light year around. Avoid direct sunlight as it will burn the leaves.

Clean the leaves once a month.

You can put Parlor Palm outside in the summer, as long as you keep it in the shade. This is a good house plant that is nearly care free.

**Snake Plant** (*Sansevieria trifasciata*)

Also known as Mother-in-law's tongue. Snake plant is normally a very vertical accent plant that comes in many varieties. It is durable and easy to grow. Flowers indoors are rare, but very memorable. Place in High light in the winter and medium light the rest of the year.



It will tolerate periods of low light. Always allow the soil to dry between watering. Snake plant will tolerate dry conditions as well. Plant in a shallow, heavy pot with porous soil. Feed every week with a diluted mixture. Clean the leaves monthly.

**Dieffenbachia** (*Dieffenbachia*)

Also known as Dumb cane, Mother-in-law plant and tuffroot. It gets its name from the toxic leaves and stems that cause numbness in the tongue when eaten. This plant rarely blooms indoors. Place in medium indirect light. It will tolerate periods of low



light. Allow the soil to dry out completely between watering. Dieffenbachia plants prefer humidity, but will tolerate dryness. If it gets too dry, the leaf tips will turn brown. So misting daily is beneficial to the plant. Feed every 14 days with a diluted solution during active growth. Clean the leaves monthly. Remove any dead leaves.



**Peacock Plant** (*Catathea makoyana*)

Also known as Brain Plant or Cathedral-windows. This plant gets its name from the patterns on its leaves. More than 100 species of *catathea* exist, most of which are quite difficult to grow indoors. Place this plant in high light all year round. Peacock plant also does well under 16 hours per day of artificial light.



There is a wide variety of patterns.



Keep the soil moist during active growth. Water less during dormancy from October through February. Repot every June. Clean the leaves every month and feed every 14 days from March to September. Pinch the plant back if it gets leggy. This plant can be a great addition to your home if you have the right conditions and patience for it to grow.

**Maidenhair Fern** *Adiantum*

Also called Delta maidenhair, Five-finger fern, Southern maidenhair and Venus's-hair.



This plant has thin, wiry stems and feathery fronds. Maidenhair fern appears delicate, but it's really quite durable. Its' fronds once were common in bouquets. Now you are most likely to find it in the Fairy Garden section of the greenhouse. It likes medium indirect light and will tolerate low light. Keep it out of the direct sunlight. Allow the soil surface to dry between watering, but never let the soil around the roots become completely dry. Maidenhair like to be misted daily and high humidity. Use soil that drains freely. Feed every 3 weeks with a diluted solution.



**DO NOT**, over-fertilize! Avoid using insecticides, because it could kill the plant. You can trim the plant back to control size and stimulate new growth.

**Gardenia** (*Gardenia jasminoides*)

Also called Cape jasmine. This is one of the more difficult flowering houseplants. But, it is well worth the effort for the scented flowers. It likes high southern exposure light in the winter, and medium indirect light the rest of the year. You can put this plant outside in the summer as long as it is in filtered light.



Gardenias like the soil kept evenly moist, but not soggy. Do not let soil around the roots dry out. Mist your gardenia daily. Raise the humidity as high as you can by humidifier or by double potting. Keep temperature in the low 60's to encourage buds, but



once buds form, the temperature needs to be above 70 degrees to keep them from dropping off.



Use acidic potting soil. Fertilize regularly, supplementing with iron chelate and 1 teaspoon of ammonium sulfate in 1 gallon of water. If it is a young plant, pinch the blooms off after one flowering period. If it is an older plant, remove spent blooms. You can then prune to shape after flowering. Some trim and train to be in a tree form. Keep the leaves clean.

**Fiddle-leaf Fig (*Ficus lyrata*)**

Fiddle-leaf fig produces shiny, leathery leaves the shape of a violin—hence the name. This plant likes medium light. Move with the seasons to keep it out of the direct sun. It will grow very well under artificial light for 16 hours a day.



Allow the surface of the soil to dry between watering. Because this plant likes high humidity, mist it every day.

Fiddle-leaf likes higher temperatures for better growth, but will tolerate 60 to 75 degrees. Make sure to use porous soil to avoid soggy around

the roots. Feed every 14 days while it is actively growing. Avoid using leaf polishes. Wipe with a dry cloth.

**Croton (*Codiaeum variegatum*)**

Croton is an unusual but striking houseplant. The color combinations in its leaves are remarkable and extremely bright. The shape of the leaves varies considerably among the different varieties.



Place the plant in high light with a southern exposure in the winter. Provide medium light the rest of the year. Lots of light is the key to the full color on the plant.

Keep the soil evenly moist. If the soil gets too dry, it will cause the plant to drop leaves. Mist daily. Maintain average temperatures. Avoid drafts, which can cause leaf drop. Feed monthly from spring to early fall, and every other month during winter. Pinch the growing tips to create a bushy plant.



**VETERANS DAY IS NOVEMBER 11**





## Creamy Chicken and Mushrooms with Egg Noodles

YIELD: Serves 4      PREP TIME: 35 minutes  
COOK: Skillet      TOTAL TIME: 45 minutes

### INGREDIENTS:

4 small boneless, skinless chicken breast halves  
Salt and Pepper to taste  
3 Tablespoons olive oil, divided  
4 cups thinly sliced button mushrooms  
2 shallots, thinly sliced (1 cup)  
4 teaspoons Dijon mustard  
2 1/2 cups low-sodium chicken broth  
4 1/2 oz. Medium egg noodles (2 1/2 cups)  
3 oz. cream cheese-room temperature  
Fresh parsley leaves for serving (optional)

### DIRECTIONS:

**Step 1.** Season chicken with salt and pepper. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large skillet over medium-high. Add chicken and cook until golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Transfer to a plate. Add mushrooms to skillet, season and cook, stirring until they begin to brown, about 7 minutes. Add shallots and remaining tablespoon of oil; cook until translucent, 1 to 2 minutes.

**Step 2.** Stir in mustard, broth and noodles; bring to boil, cover and reduce heat to medium and simmer 3 minutes. Uncover; stir in cream cheese. Cook, stirring until noodles are tender and sauce coats a spoon, about 3 minutes. Return Chicken to skillet and cook through, about 1 more minute. Dish up servings, sprinkle with parsley and serve.



## Do you Remember When?

Raking leaves in the fall! Huge piles of yellow, orange, red and brown. You know you had to try it....Run and Jump! That pile of leaves was never as soft and fluffy as it looked.

We then piled them up in the barn yard along with a pile of sticks that had been gathered from the last few months and burned them. Of course, this was 50 years ago, and in the country. Everyone burned their leaves and sticks. And we had lots of trees, with lots of sticks to pick up!

When the fire calmed down, Mom would throw some potatoes into the burning pile of sticks. After a while she would come back out with some hotdogs. We sat around the burning embers and roasted the hotdogs. When we had finished roasting all of them, Mom took her garden rake and pulled the potatoes out. She carefully picked them up with an oven mitt and put them in a bowl. We took all the roasted food into the house and had our supper of fire roasted baked potatoes and hot dogs! Then the fun part! We went back out to the embers and made s'mores! What an absolutely wonderful way to spend a fall evening with the entire family! Take time this fall to roast some hot dogs and s'mores with your children or grandchildren. Make memories that will last a lifetime! ☺



## November UP COMMING EVENTS

- **November 7th**, Daylight savings time ends. Turn your clocks back one hour. Remember the old saying, "Spring ahead, Fall back"
- **November 11, Veterans Day** Please give thanks to our Veterans. **"All Gave Some, Some Gave All!"**





- **November 25, 2021** Thanksgiving Day
- **November 28, 2021** Hanukkah Begins
- **March 5, 2022** Women Gaining Ground Conference, Glenwood, Iowa
- **March 19, 2022** Cass County Spring Conference, Atlantic, Iowa
- **March 26, 2022** (Pending) Mills County Spring Conference, Malvern, Iowa
- **April 9, 2022 West** Pottawattamie County Spring Conference, Council Bluffs, Iowa
- Check out the **Mills County Master Gardener** Facebook Page  
<https://www.facebook.com/MillsCountyMasterGardeners>
- Check out **Iowa Master Gardeners** on Facebook  
<https://www.facebook.com/iastategardeners/>



## November GARDENING TO DO LIST



- **Protect** rhododendrons, hydrangeas and other broad-leaf plants evergreen plants. Use a protective screen of burlap on the north and west side to help protect the plants from the bitter winter wind.
- **Remove** and destroy any diseased leaves from plants to help minimize future problems.
- **Remove and destroy** all the dead and dying Iris foliage to prevent iris borers from over-wintering.
- **Protect** tender vines this coming winter from rabbits and voles. Place hardware cloth starting a few inches below the soil, wrapping around the stock up to several feet high. Or, cut the bottom out of a 5 gallon bucket and place around the plant, pushing it into the soil a couple of inches.
- **Monitor** and manage whiteflies, aphids, mites and other insects that may have come indoors with your plants that you brought in for the winter.
- **Water Lilies.** If your lily pond is **not** deep enough to keep from freeze solid, bring your lilies in and place the potted plants in an in a tub or bucket. Move them to a cool dark place in your basement. Periodically them just enough water to keep moist.
- **Pull** pumps from your water fountains and shallow lily ponds to prevent them from freezing damage. Clean and winterize them. Place netting over ponds to help keep them free of blowing leaves and debris.
- **Continue** to water newly planted trees and shrubs until the ground freezes.
- **Continue** feeding our winter resident birds. If you have heated birdbaths, keep them fill and clean them regularly.

- Place your ceramic pots inside a shed out of the elements to help keep them from cracking or breaking.



## Resources for Horticulture information Iowa State University Publication

RG 320	Growing and overwintering Geraniums
RG 311	Growing and overwintering Tender Perennials
PM 713	Indoor Plants
RG 402	Lighting and Houseplants
PM 731	Harvesting and Storing Vegetables
PM 1078	Harvesting and Storing Apples
PM 1398	Harvesting and Drying Flowers
RG 312	Suggested Daffodil Cultivars for Iowa
RG 319	When to Divide Perennials
PM 683	Composting Yard Waste
PM 1072	Establishing a Lawn from Seed

## Horticulture Publications on-line

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/store/ListCategories>



## ISU Hotline Links and Numbers

### Hotlines available for all

**Iowa Concern 800-447-1985** Financial questions, legal education, stress counseling, crisis/disaster resources and referral (24 hrs - all days)

**Beginning Farmer Center 877-BFC-1999** Program to match beginning and retiring farmers (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

**Teen Line 800-443-8336** Personal and health-related information and referral (24 hrs - all days)

**Iowa 2-1-1 211** Resource referral for housing, health, food, family, transportation, employment, education, and legal assistance (24 hrs - all days)

### Hot lines available for Iowa Residents Only

**AnswerLine Toll-free: 800-262-3804 Local: 515-296-5883**

Questions relating to home and family (9 am-noon & 1-4 pm)

**Iowa Healthy Families 800-369-2229** Health information and referral (24 hrs - all days)

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