

POPULAR HOUSEPLANTS FOR 2021

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As we continue to sequester ourselves at home, many of us are adding more houseplants to our homes or apartments and planning for expansion of outdoor flower and vegetable gardens later this spring. Houseplants have many advantages; not only do they add beauty and color to a room, but they can help make the room healthier. Studies have shown that some plants may help to remove air pollutants, and if nothing else, can help you feel less stressed and more creative. A few of these helpful plants include certain species of palms (*Rhapsis excelsa* and *Chrysalidocarpus lutescens*), rubber plant (*Ficus spp.*), English ivy (*Hedera helix*), Boston fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata*), Chinese evergreen (*Aglaonema*), philodendron vines, and Snake plant (*Sanseveiria*).

The most popular houseplants for 2021 are expected to be those with patterned or textured foliage, those that are edible (i.e., herbs, edible flowers/foliage, and “mini” vegetables), and those that do well in low light. And of course, many of us would add easy maintenance to that list. With those criteria in mind, we scoured the University of Maryland Extension Service and several other web sites for a few of the most often recommended plants.

Patterned/textured foliage

This past year, the fiddle leaf fig (*Ficus lyrata*) has been quite popular, but plant prognosticator and long-time columnist Joyce Mast predicts that *Ficus altissima* (the omnipresent rubber tree) will take over in 2021 because it is easier to care for and has “velvety variegated leaves” (<https://www.treehugger.com/top-houseplant-trends>). *F. altissima* grows to be quite large, can survive low light, and is well known for its ability to remove toxins from the air, and for its low maintenance. In fact, it has long been a very popular office plant, probably because of that last reason.

Other plants Mast recommends for their foliage include *Anthurium hookeri*, *A. crystallinum*, and several species of *Alocasia* (*A. black velvet*, *polly*, *regal shield*, and *frydek*). *Alocasias* like moist but not overly saturated soil and bright to medium indirect light. Although they all have long, deeply heart-shaped leaves with prominent white veins, individual species vary. For example, *A. polly*’s leaves are sharply scalloped, almost like holly leaves; *A. regal shield*, also known as Elephant Ears, has rather broad leaves and may grow quite large or tall indoors.

Edible plants

You may have potted up some of your herbs last fall for continued use in the kitchen this winter. Basil, rosemary, sage, chervil, and thyme grow well inside to use for cooking—or just grow them indoors for their unique scents. Mint is another that does well inside; it can be quite a thug and very invasive in the garden outside. Next fall, you’ll want to check the University of Maryland Extension Service

(https://extension.umd.edu/sites/extension.umd.edu/files/_docs/programs/hgic/HGIC_Pubs/houseplants_seasonal/HG%20105OverwinteringTropicalPlants_2018.pdf) to see other herbs or other edible plants you can bring inside, and what kind of light, moisture levels, etc., they’ll need.

Low-light plants

If you brought in tropical plants from outdoors last fall, you've probably already treated them for pests and dealt with leaves yellowing and dropping before they became accustomed to the changes in light and atmosphere. Once inside last October, my Brugemania initially lost all of its leaves, although the coleus at its base has maintained color and leaves. I sequestered Brugemania in a spare room and watered it regularly. Despite the low light of the room, leaves are once more beginning to grow from the Brugemania stalk.

The University of Maryland Extension Service web site says that "Supplemental lighting with cool white florescent lights can improve survival [of tropical plants]. Don't expect the plants to grow much, if at all, during the winter months because the light conditions are simply too low. When plants receive reduced light, their need for water also declines. It is very important not to overwater them, especially during the initial adjustment period. Water only when the soil is dry. Remember, the larger the pot, the longer it takes for the soil to dry."

Plants that do well indoors in medium to low light include various species of Snake plant (*Sansevieria*), philodendron vine, pothos vine (*Scindapsis*; related to philodendron), Peace lily (*Spathiphyllum*), Chinese evergreen (*Aglaonema*), and Dracaena. Beware: While most plants grow very little in low-light conditions, others can grow several feet.

For further information about houseplants, you may want to review the following web sites:

- <https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/herbs>
- <https://www.treehugger.com/top-houseplant-trends-4858425>
- <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/houseplants/hpgen/acclimate-plants-indoors-winter.htm>
- <https://www.apartmenttherapy.com/bloomscape-top-plant-trends-2021-36852168>

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1. **Plants with patterned or textured foliage.** The Snake plant has been a popular houseplant for many years. It hits a lot of wickets: is easy maintenance; grows well in many light conditions, provides height and interest with its varied patterns in foliage; and perhaps best of all, helps to clean the air. The one pictured here has horizontally striped patterns; some have vertical chartreuse edgings along the leaves. (Source: Courtesy photo)

2. **Medium- to low-light plants:** *Spathiphyllum*, Peace Lily, does best in medium or indirect bright light. It often sports flowers in white, pale pink, or light red. It is another of those plants that help to clean the air in your home, including, in this case, removing mold spores. (Source: <https://calvertflorist.com/peace-lily-10-inch-pot.html>)



For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596. Find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland>

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