

Philodendrons Make Great Houseplants

Philodendrons are popular, versatile and easy foliage plants for the indoor landscape. Members of the Arum family, philodendrons are native to the West Indies and the tropical jungles of Central and South America. Most are vines with leaves varying from three inches to three feet in length, depending on the species. Some species are self-heading and require no support.

Philodendrons have many uses, including houseplants as tabletop plants or floor specimens. For interior landscape plantings in offices, lobbies or shopping malls, philodendrons are used as upright plants or highly suitable as groundcovers, depending on the variety selected. The plants do well as long as they are kept warm (65 degrees F. minimum), moderately moist, and out of direct sunlight. Philodendrons do best in a well-drained potting soil that contains organic matter.

Propagation

Philodendrons can be propagated by tip and leaf bud cuttings. Air layering is used to reduce the overall height of “leggy” plants. Some commercial growers



use seed for propagation of select varieties. Newer varieties are propagated by tissue culture.

Fertilization

Fertilizers are available as powders, tablets, liquids or pellets. All work equally well if manufacturer's directions are followed. Apply fertilizer only to moist soil to prevent injury to the roots. It is safer to lightly fertilize more often than to apply one strong dose.

Plants growing in low light conditions require less fertilizer than actively growing plants. Some plants can live for a long period of time without supplemental fertilization.

A regular feeding program with a nitrogen fertilizer increases the leaf size and makes a larger plant. Philodendrons can be considered heavy feeders. Avoid fertilizing in the winter allowing the plant to slow down and rest.

Watering

Keep the soil moist, but not soggy. Never allow the potting mix to dry out. Ample water is one of the essential factors in keeping philodendrons growing evenly with large uniform leaves. Philodendrons prefer high humidity, 60 percent or more. Make sure that all excess water drains. Overwatering causes root injury, which causes leaves to turn yellow and eventually fall off.

Light

Grow in indirect sunlight. There are many types of philodendron that maintain themselves in low light intensity. Artificial light-- a mixture of fluorescent and incandescent-- gives best results if natural light is not present. Full sunlight can cause a yellowing color in the leaves or a sunburn spot.

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Popular Philodendron Species

Philodendron cordatum The most widely grown philodendron. Has heart-shaped leaves. Can be used as a climber or in hanging baskets. Often grown in water or moss. Common name: Heartleaf Philodendron.

Philodendron scandens micans Silky bronze, heart-shaped leaves that are reddish on the underside. Very susceptible to cold. Leaves three inches long. Grown as a climber or in hanging baskets. Common name: Velvet-leaf Philodendron.

Long-leaved Types that Require Support on Bark or Totem Poles

Philodendron pertusum (Correctly known as *Monstera deliciosa*) Juvenile form has shorter leaves that are irregularly shaped, sometimes slightly perforated or entire. Adult form has broad, thick leaves with many perforations. This philodendron can climb prolifically in ideal conditions to heights of 60 feet. Common name: Swiss Cheese plant.



Philodendron domesticum formerly called *Philodendron hastatum*- Arrow-shaped glossy leaves. Mature leaves may be 22 inches long by 9 inches wide. A good plant for the home with poor growing conditions. Can grow to heights to 15 to 20 feet. Common name: Spade leaf Philodendron.

Philodendron bipennifolium formerly called *Philodendron panduriforme*- Foliage resembles a

violin, hence the common name Fiddle leaf philodendron. Leaves up to 20 inches long by 8 inches wide. An excellent houseplant. Maintains leaves for an exceptionally long time. Good climber with heights of 15 feet. Common name: Fiddle leaf.

Large-leaved Types

Philodendron melanochrysum also known as *Philodendron andreanum*- Long, dark, iridescent leaves. Sensitive to cold and dry atmosphere. Common name: Black Gold Philodendron. Can reach heights of 15-20 feet.

Philodendron angustisectum formerly known as *Philodendron elegans*- Fern-like leaves, up to 20 inches long and 16 inches wide. Few air roots. Can reach heights of 15 feet.

Self-heading Types Requiring no Support

Philodendron wendlandii Long, narrow, glossy dark green leaves that grow in a rosette. Makes an excellent specimen plant, as it is symmetrical on all sides. Can withstand extremes of temperatures and humidity.

Philodendron selloum (*P. bipinnatifidum*) Large, twice lobed, glossy leaves up to 40 inches long. Excellent plant for unfavorable conditions and grows to tremendous size. Too large for the average home. This species has four distinct leaf stages from seedling to adult. It may be kept in any stage for long periods of time by keeping it potbound. This species is resistant to cold and can stand 32 degrees F. temperatures.

Philodendron 'Xanadu' A smaller, more compact growing habit than *P. selloum*. Better suited for use in the home. This philodendron is propagated by tissue culture.

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Problems

Small Leaves- Plants need to be fertilized; soil not moist enough; potting mixture is too hard and not thoroughly soaked; insufficient light; soil is constantly too moist.

Leaves Turn Brown- Soluble salts cause tip burn or edges of leaves to turn brown. Salts may be flushed out by letting water run slowly through the pot for one hour. Browning of tip margins also may result from drafts, overwatering, poor drainage, lack of water or lack of fertilizer.

Yellow Leaves (excessive) and Leaf Drop- Plant is over watered. Make sure the pot has drainage and the plant is not sitting in water. Too much or too little light and lack of fertilizer may be contributing factors.

Gradual Slowing of Growth- Smaller leaves on plant often indicates a pot bound condition. Repot the plant. This condition may result from insufficient water, fertilizer or light, or from poor aeration of roots.

Weak or Yellowish Color on Leaves- If the plant appears healthy, the problem may be too much light, either artificial or from the sun.

Leaves Don't Split *Philodendron pertusum* (*Monstera deliciosa*)- needs more light than other philodendrons or the leaves will not “split”. Leaves still in a juvenile stage generally are entire. Leaves on older plants sometimes return to the entire form from the “split or cut” form when growing conditions are unfavorable or when the plant grows beyond its support.

Air Roots- Some philodendrons have many air roots. If objectionable, they can be removed.

Dust on Leaves- A gentle spray of clear water helps wash the dust off the leaves. Soapy water can be used, if necessary. Keep soapy water off the soil.

Plants Growing Beyond Support Pole- Older plants eventually grow beyond the end of the supporting trellis or pole. If this happens, cut back the stem to force new branches to develop. The stem must be fastened to the support. Give the plant more light and decrease the water until new growth starts. The tops of the plants can also be air layered prior to reshaping the plant.



Shopping List/Notes

About Your Expert

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PlantAmerica Horticulturist Donna Moramarco (a.k.a. “Donna in the Garden”) has been helping gardeners solve problems and achieve their dreams for over two decades. Donna has degrees in horticulture and education plus over 20 years as a Cornell University extension horticulturist.