

PESTS & DISEASES

As long as the general needs of a plant are met, the risks of pest and disease attack are much reduced. If plants suffer stress from a lack of water or scorch they become weak and prone to infection. Look out for the following problems:

- Aphids (blackfly, greenfly) suck sap, weakening the plant, and transmit virus and disease. The upper leaf surface becomes sticky with excreted honeydew. Spray with a product containing imidacloprid or bifenthrin when plants are in active growth, or use organic insecticides such as pyrethrum, fatty acids or vegetable oils.
- Red spider mites suck sap, bleach plants and spin fine webs under leaves, which then shrivel and fall. Spiders only turn red in autumn. Spray with bifenthrin or use a predatory mite *Phytoseiulus persimilis*.

- Scale insect - barnacle-like insects attack stems and leaves of many glasshouse plants. Treat the problem while the scales are soft and young, using an insecticide such as midacloprid, fatty acid or vegetable oils.
- Botrytis (grey mould) is a fuzzy grey fungal growth that covers stems and leaves, which turn grey-brown and rot. Destroy affected material and improve ventilation. Sooty mould, a black fungus, grows on aphid-secreted honeydew. Control aphids; wash affected parts with soapy water.
- Virus - leaves that are distorted, twisted, or have yellow mottling and streaking may be affected with a virus transmitted by aphids. Treat against aphids and destroy infected material.

See our leaflet: *Pests & Diseases* for more information or ask your local garden centre or nursery.

COOL CONSERVATORY PLANTS

Not only do various house plants enhance the home, but also many of them can be moved outdoors in summer to add extra colour and interest to the garden before being over wintered in an unheated conservatory (as long as temperatures do not drop below freezing). These include camellias, several palms, citrus plants and succulents such as mesembryanthemum and aeonium. In summer, place pots outside to brighten your window box, patio or garden, or lower them into readily prepared holes in a border or bed. You can submerge plants in their pots and simply dig them up and move them indoors before winter frosts strike.



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A good houseplant reference book
 - Compost for re-potting
 - Watering can with long spout
 - Plant sprayer for misting
 - Indoor thermometer
 - Secateurs
 - Pest repellent
 - Selection of plant pots
 - Bamboo cane & wire for training climbers
 - Liquid fertiliser
- For more information:
www.rhs.org.uk/advice
www.plantforlife.info

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- Tel: **0118 930 3132** or visit www.the-hta.org.uk
- *PlantforLife* - visit www.plantforlife.info



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THE EASY GUIDE TO CONSERVATORY PLANTS



Photography: Marianne Majerus, Tim Sandall/*The Garden*, Mike Grant, GPL/Michele Lamontagne

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WHERE DO I START?

Bold dramatic foliage, tactile succulents, sweetly scented blooms and scrambling climbers can all easily be grown in a conservatory. Outdoor plants from all over the globe can be enjoyed inside the home, and a little research into where the plants grow in the wild greatly helps in finding out the growing conditions they need.

Literally thousands of plants are suitable for growing indoors, but before making a selection, look at the conditions you have. Light levels, temperature, space, and water availability all help dictate the choices open to you as well as your personal preference. Remember that each plant group has different requirements, so it is wise to check plant labels and ask your garden centre or nursery for advice before buying. Decide how much time you have available to care for indoor plants, and how much you want to spend. If buying conservatory plants for the first time, try easy-to-grow ones first, to find out which flourish in your conditions.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS

Most conservatory plants do not need intensive aftercare – just pot them on every few years.

TEMPERATURE: Sudden fluctuations between day and night temperatures can be damaging, so try to minimise these. Ensure that your plant is not subjected to temperatures lower than it can withstand or higher than 27°C. Keep the growing space well ventilated.

HUMIDITY: Most plants benefit from a daily misting with a hand-held spray gun filled with rain-water or luke-warm tap water. In centrally heated rooms, increase humidity by hanging humidifiers on radiators and put pots on trays full of damp gravel or on an up-turned saucer in a dish of water.

WATERING: Over watering is the most common cause of house-

plant death. As excess water builds up around roots it becomes toxic causing the roots to rot. In winter – unless they are flowering – the growth of many plants slows down as does their water intake. Keep a close eye on your plants – if leaves are limp and compost feels dry then watering is needed. Water most plants from above, although cyclamen are better watered from below.

FEEDING: Plants need food when they are actively growing, usually in spring and summer. Add liquid fertilisers to water or mix slow-release granules into the compost.

LIGHT & SHADE: Intense bright light can burn the leaves on some plants. Position them where they get sunlight only for part of the day or use conservatory blinds.



FLOWERING PLANTS

AGAPANTHUS: (pictured right) are grown for their deep blue rounded flowers in late summer. Both these and the seed heads are good for flower arranging. The smooth strap-shaped leaves stay all year. A useful addition if you have limited space or a pot on a window sill. Agapanthus are frost tender, but can be planted out in summer and overwintered inside.

ABUTILON: (flowering maple) are attractive evergreen shrubs if you have a little more conservatory space. The leaves are palmate (maple like) and the bell-shaped lemon-yellow flowers bloom from spring right through into autumn. Like agapanthus, abutilons can be moved outdoors in summer.

BOUGAINVILLEA: (pictured right) requiring frost-free conditions this spectacular climber produces a multitude of brightly-coloured papery bracts for a long-lived display. Free-standing pot-grown plants can be placed outside to enliven your garden in summer.

JASMINUM: (jasmine) is best known for its beautifully scented blooms, and *Jasminum officinale* is one of the most popular. A climber, it benefits from support and can easily be trained to the desired shape. The flowers bloom from summer right into autumn. Jasmine prefers a sunny, yet airy position, and the compost should be kept moist at all times. Free-standing pot-grown plants can be moved outdoors in summer.

CALLISTEMON: (bottle brush) (pictured right) is an eye-catching choice, with fluffy, fiery-coloured blooms and seeds like small woody beads. This evergreen shrub copes well with dry air and thrives in sun.



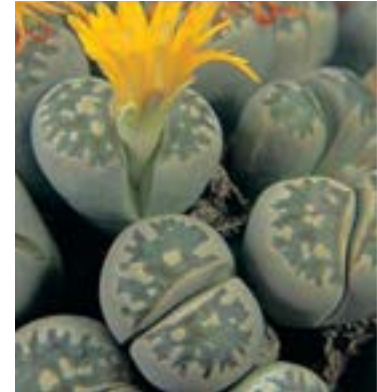
FOLIAGE PLANTS

- **Begonia rex** (painted leaf begonia) varieties have brilliantly coloured heart-shaped leaves in all colours of the rainbow. The 20cm-long leaves are a rich metallic-green marbled with crimson, purple, pink, brown and silver. Delicate panicles of pink flowers provide further interest in winter. A sunny position is said to enhance the red coloration and shade intensifies the metallic sheen.
- **Chamaerops humilis** (dwarf fan palm) is excellent as an indoor plant, with a compact habit and a maximum height and spread of up to 3m indoors. Its attractive arched fronds of glossy green fan-like leaflets are held on spined stalks. Originating from the Mediterranean, chamaerops benefit from growing in a gritty, free-draining compost.

SUCCULENTS: Ideal for a sunny spot, succulents only require occasional watering. They survive in arid areas of the world by storing water in their fleshy leaves.

- **Agave** (century plant) was a popular house plant even in Victorian times. The rigid rosette of leaves are edged with sharp spines. Once the plant has flowered, it sets seed and dies, but this only happens roughly every 25 years.
- **Ceropegia woodii** (string of hearts) produces unusual necklace-like strings of heart-shaped fleshy leaves, marbled grey and green. Ideal for a hanging basket with a gravelly compost mix.
- **Lithops** (living stone) are smooth and tactile, mimicking the pebbles that naturally surround them in the wild. The result is an attractive range of mottled colorations and patterns. A rounded stem-like body

stores water in their native desert conditions. Do not over water especially in winter. White or pink daisy-like flowers bloom from the centre of the pebble in late autumn (below).



EPIPHYTES: In the wild, epiphytes gain all the water and nutrients they need from rainwater and debris that fall into their centre. Their root system is small and only used to support the plant in position so these plants do not need soil to grow nor require potting on often.

- **Billbergia nutans** (queen's tears) is one of the easiest bromeliads to grow. Green-grey leaves about 50cm long are arranged in a rosette, which helps to channel water and nutrients into the centre of the plant. From here, flower spikes emerge in winter, each bearing a cluster of small pink, yellow and blue flowers.
- **Platyserium bifurcatum** (stags horn fern) – the spectacular upper fronds stand erect like stag's antlers while the lower fronds curl around the base, and grip onto the chosen support. It is ideal for a semi-shaded area and enjoys high humidity.