



Garden Scoop

Indoor Plants – Lifesavers

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Inside this issue:

African Violets	2
Plant Profile	3
Treemendous	3
7 Essentials;	4
Farm-to-School Grants	
Clinic Clatter	5
Happy Houseplants	
Light for Houseplants	6
Events	7



Lake County MGVS Mission Statement

The mission of UF/IFAS Lake County Master Gardener Volunteers is to assist extension agents by providing horticultural education programs and current research-based information to the public through plant clinics, community outreach and Discovery Gardens.

The third week of September is [National Indoor Plant Week](#). The week was established to bring awareness of the importance of indoor plants. The benefits of using plants indoors are numerous. Most of the research done on this topic focused on the workplace but the benefits can also apply to the home. Just a few plants indoors can have benefits. Studies of plants and their effect on stress showed a 37% reduction in anxiety; 57% less depression; 44% decrease in hostility; and 38% less fatigue. There was also a study done in the 80's that revealed the positive impact of plants on the "sick building syndrome". This is a condition that results in the release of harmful toxins such as xylene and benzene from carpet, paint, and other synthetic building materials. It was shown that plants definitely helped with the elimination of the toxins. Not only will they help with toxins inside but also mold and bacteria. Research found that in rooms filled with plants there was 50 to 60 percent less toxins. It is further interesting to note that plants not only absorb toxins but also mold and bacteria. Metabolic breakdown occurs when toxins go down into the roots and are used as plant food.

Besides health benefits of indoor plants, there are also aesthetic benefits. Just as landscape outdoors can add value to property, "landscaping"

indoors can do the same. I stayed at a hotel in Nashville, Opryland, that is a perfect example of how indoor plants can add beauty and value. Over 1 million dollars was spent on about 18,000 plants within the 12 acres of indoor space. A study found that the main factor of a higher than normal occupancy rate of this hotel was the indoor plants.



In 2018 Amazon demonstrated their understanding of indoor plants in the workplace by planting over 40,000 plants in their Seattle headquarters, the glass domed "spheres". They are employing the idea of biophilia – the natural human connection to nature – can make the workplace happier and healthier.



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African Violets

By K.S. Kennen, MGv

The African violet, *Saintpaulia*, became a favored houseplant after first being introduced to Germany by Baron Walter von Saint Paul-Illaire in 1892 from Tanzania, Africa. The plant has a single or clustered bloom with a variety of colors from blue to violet, lavender, pink, red-violet, lavender pink, and white. The flower can be single, double, semi-double, star-shaped, fringed, and ruffled. Even the leaf can be divided into eight kinds: plain, quilted, spidered, ruffled, fringed, scalloped, spooned, pointed, and variegated. The plants are also classified by size that is determined by the plant's diameter. **Micro** has a diameter of less than three inches; **mini** is from three to six inches; **semi-mini** is six to eight inches; **standard** is eight to sixteen inches; and **giant** is larger than sixteen. It is amazing to find that since the Baron brought the African violet to his homeland that there are over 16,000 cultivars.



Photo: Regina D, MGv

Just as any other houseplant, consider three basic things when growing an African violet successfully: light, water, and container. No direct sunlight for the plant; rather place it in a southeast or west facing window. Remember this plant will tell you when the light is incorrect because the leaves act as a litmus paper for light levels. If the leaves are a deep green the light is too low and if the leaves are a pale or greenish-yellow there is too much light. Be sure that your plant receives not only eight to ten hours of light but also at least eight hours of darkness to bloom. You can also grow African violets under artificial light if natural is not available. Fluorescent or LED lights would work since they do not give heat off that could harm the plant. Water is another important factor since the plant likes to have moist soil but not soggy since this can cause a lack of nitrogen getting to the plant and lead to root rot, crown rot, or *Phythium* (plant parasite). One thing that can be helpful in water and soil moisture for the African violet is the container in which it is planted. A clay pot is okay since it is porous and does not let moisture built up. Plastic will work if there is adequate drainage. Also there is a double ceramic pot system that has an outside glazed pot and an inside unglazed porous pot to allow water to be absorbed through it and not result in over watering, a common mistake for beginning growers.

Just as with some other plants, the African violet can have diseases and pests. Thrips, if they appear can be rinsed off with mild soapy water but be sure to blot plant dry to prevent spots forming from light on the leaves. Mealybugs can also be a problem and can be dabbed with swabs dipped in alcohol and removed. Cyclamen mites might also be a problem. Cyclamen mites will cause leaf distortion in the new center leaves. The newest growth/leaves in the center of the plant will become severely stunted. Leaves may become brittle, very small and may be cupped. Color may also change to bronze, gray or tan. If you identify your problem as mites it is best to discard the plant. Powdery mildew can be treated simply by removing the infected leaves and isolating the plant which should increase circulation. Root rot and bud blight caused by over watering and high humidity are easiest taken care of by discarding the plant.

In spite of the problems resulting from improper light, water, humidity, etc. the simple beauty is enough for many homes to have the African violet brightening up a room.

For more info: EDIS [ENH17](#) | [African Violets](#) | [Plant ID](#) | [Growing](#) African Violets |



Photos: UF/IFAS

Treemendous!

Sudden Limb Drop

By J.Daugherty, RH Agent

Trees are a great addition to landscapes. They provide shade to both the home and understory plants. It is always important to get a professional to prune large canopy trees twice a year, but is that enough? Are there other issues that you should know about? The answer is, yes.

A member of the public recently contacted the plant clinic about a sycamore tree in her yard that was dropping limbs for no apparent reason. Normally there are signs that a limb is about to drop, or there would be rot visible on the fallen limb. After looking at the homeowner's photos and seeing no sign of any issues, more research was needed to determine the cause.

While I worked for the NYC Parks Department, I became familiar with the elms and black locust trees dropping limbs in central park; it was just something that they did. Parks employees knew not to stay under those trees. I started looking into something similar happening with sycamores.

What I found was sudden limb drop syndrome. Sometimes called summer limb drop syndrome, because it occurs more often in the summer. Sudden limb drop is exactly what it sounds like. A tree will drop a seemingly healthy branch out of the blue with no storm, no rot, no warning. This is clearly quite the safety concern. The exact cause of the syndrome is unknown, though the current thinking is that it is related to a water issue and high temperatures. The research is still out on this though. There are trees more susceptible to sudden limb drop than others: oaks, elms, eucalyptus, and sycamores are the most susceptible to this syndrome in our area, though beech and black locust also drop limbs in the northeast. While these trees are known to have issues with limb drop, any tree has the potential to drop limbs without notice. For example, many pine trees self-prune by dropping limbs.

So, what can you do? Keep your trees properly pruned to protect you from possible damage. Never top a tree, this increases the chance of limb drop due to poor branch attachment. Remember to always hire an [ISA Certified Arborist](#). Proper maintenance can significantly reduce risk.

Lady Palm

by Cathy Leavers, MGv

If you want to bring a tropical look indoors, the lady palm (*Rhapis excelsa*) is a good choice. It has glossy, dark green palmate leaves that grow atop slender fiber covered stems and is considered a clustering palm since there is not one single stem, but clusters of them together. This palm will also have clusters of small white flowers on a stem (inflorescence) that become small white fruit that can be used to propagate the palm although it is easier to divide the plant if you want more lady palms. This palm is considered to be one of the best for use under low light interiorscape conditions.

It will do best when placed near an east facing window. When the soil is dry to touch, water the palm until water run out the bottom but be sure to empty the saucer or dish so the pot does not sit in water. You can fertilize but only do so in the summer and use half strength liquid houseplant fertilizer. As the lady palm grows, it may be necessary to thin it out from time to time.

Repotting every two years will keep the soil fresh and the plant healthy. Some growers recommend using African violet potting soil since it will have proper density to keep healthy aeration. A larger pot can be used each time until the plant reaches your preferred size, then keep the same size pot and use new soil.

For more info:

EDIS [FPS501](#) & [ENH1010](#) | [Fact Sheet](#) | Our [Nov. 2018](#) articles



Seven Essentials for Caring for Houseplants

Compiled By: Reggie D., MGV

1. **Caring for** indoor plants is just as important as your outdoor ones: Light, Air, and Water are all important factors. Here are some helpful links: [Caring for Houseplants](#), your [Plant Pets](#), and [Light](#)
2. Just like outdoors, **Indoor plants get pests** too – spider mites, fungus gnats, aphids, scale, mealybugs, white flies. Here's how to recognize the signs and symptoms of these: Houseplant [pests](#), Common [indoor pests](#), and from [EDIS ENY-330](#).
3. Now that school is starting, here is a list of [Plants for Schools](#), that will help teach children the benefits and how to care for them.
4. What are some [Benefits](#) of having an indoor garden? **They CLEAN the air!**
5. Now the hardest part of any gardening project: **Choosing your Indoor garden specimens!** Here are several UF/IAS links to help you with that: [Indoor gardens](#), [Featured](#) houseplants, [Fragrant](#) ones, For the [forgetful gardener](#), [Florida](#) houseplants, Houseplant [topics](#), and [Resolutions](#).
6. Common indoor plants are the [Ficus](#), or [Pothos](#) (beware of planting these outdoors as they will grow aggressively). But
7. BEWARE! Some plants can be noxious or deadly to pets and/or children, **Deadly:** UF/IFAS [list](#), [Humane Society](#), and [Toxic Plants](#) from Gardening Solutions.



Farm to School Grants

By Dianne Venetta

The Lake County Extension Office, along with Lake County School District and [Blooming Thyme Collaborative](#), are fortunate to have been awarded a Farm to School grant that helps bring local foods to schools while supporting American producers. This is the most money allotted (12.1 million dollars) to 159 programs since the grant program's inception.

The grants will help build bright futures for our children by connecting them to where their food comes from, while also nourishing the local economy and supporting American agriculture. To help target funds to high-impact projects, FNS (Food and Nutrition Service) awarded bonus points to applications serving schools with a high population of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals; submitted by or serving tribal nations; and located in or targeting an Opportunity Zone, a census tract designation for low-income communities. In all, the projects will serve more than 7,610 schools and 2.5 million students, more than half of whom are eligible for free or reduced priced meals.

For more information and how to volunteer to help with the project, contact Dianne Venetta, dianne@bloominthymecollaborative.org



Plant Clinic Chatter

By Reggie D., MGVS

Dear Master Gardener,

My houseplants have outgrown their containers, what's the best way to repot them?

Dear Homeowner,

All things that grow need new frocks! So it's just as important to repot your container plants as it is to buy new shoes for growing feet! Here are instructions direct from our UF/IFAS Gardening Solutions page on [Houseplant Care](#):

"You'll need some sterile potting mix and a pot or container with adequate drainage that's a few inches larger than the old one. Slide the plant out of its old pot and inspect the roots. If they're tangled or circling (AKA "rootbound"), use your fingers to loosen them. Put some potting mix in the bottom of the new pot, and position the plant so that the soil line is one inch below the edge. Add more potting mix around the rootball, pressing lightly on the soil to eliminate any large air pockets. Finally, water the plant well.

Plants that aren't rootbound can also benefit from repotting. Just use the original container instead of a larger one, and swap out the old potting media for fresh.

You can see the process, step by step, in our photo tutorial on Flickr: [How to Repot Indoor Plants](#)."

More Info: [Growing Happy Houseplants](#) |

Rootbound *Spathiphyllum*
Photo: Alex Bolques,
MGVS Gadsden County

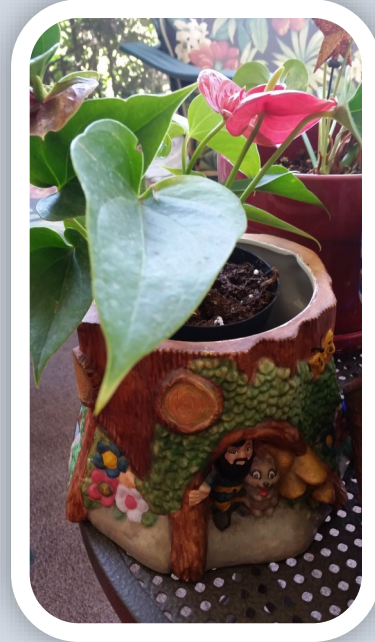
Care of [Plants in the Home](#)



Happy Houseplants!

BY Jean Davidson MGVS

Let's see how we can make houseplants more interesting. How about using unusual containers. This is a cookie jar!!



No drain holes—no problem. Just put plant with soil in smaller, inserted container that has drain holes. Add stones to the bottom of the cookie jar to make sure the plant is not standing in water.

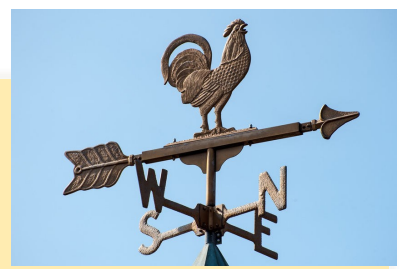
Give your houseplants an artistic look.

Happy planting!



Light for Houseplants

By K.S. Kennen, MGv



Light is one of the elements necessary for houseplants to have in order for them to grow. There are four types of [natural light](#) available in most homes for houseplants. First, there is the full sun that comes from a south facing window. Most plants do not like full sun since it may cause plant damage and the plant will not survive in the heat of direct sunlight. Two types that would survive are cacti and succulents. Secondly, a plant placed close to a west or east facing window will get partial sunlight and shade. It has some morning and evening sun without



any of the heat of the midday sun. This light is good for many plants, especially flowering. Third, there is shade or low light which can be present in north facing windows. A north facing window is full shade but can become low light depending on the size and number of windows. A few plants that grow in low light are cast iron plant, mother-in-law tongue, or ZZ plant. The fourth light category in the home is direct sun. Placement of the plant from the window is essential in this category. Plants set in south facing windows need to be a few feet from the window. Plants in east and west facing windows need to be far enough back so the midday sun and sunset does not harm them. This type of lighting is a requirement for most foliage and flowering plants.



Photos: UF/IFAS

MGV, Sandra Bryan, had some indoor dragon palms (*Dracaena marginata* AKA Madagascar Dragon tree) once. They continued to decline until she spotted her male cat, Roswell, peeing on them. She took them outside and flushed the soil with clean water before repotting. They came back—what a treat! NOTE: Lucky for Roswell he didn't chew the leaves! [Dracaena](#) are very toxic to pets.



Drawing by:
R.Doherty , MGV

Calendar of Events

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all events are virtual or postponed. To see our online opportunities, please visit <http://lakediscoverygardensprograms.eventbrite.com/>.

Tuesday Zoom classes, [register online](#) for the class and free plants! 1:00-2:00pm

- ◆ **9/1: Edibles** \$26: get 2 plants
- ◆ **9/8: Bromeliads** \$15: get 2 plants
- ◆ **9/15: Perennials** \$25: get 2 plants
- ◆ **9/22: Succulents** \$15: get 2 plants
- ◆ **9/29: Pollinators** \$25: get 3 plants
- ◆ **9/4: What's Growing on my Tree?** FREE UF/IFAS Ext., Lake County Office's weekly [Growing Together from a Distance](#)
- ◆ **9/11: Strawberry, Production/Culinary uses in FL:** FREE UF/IFAS Ext., Lake County Office's weekly [Growing Together from a Distance](#)

Be sure to catch our monthly *From the Extension* articles in the *Daily Commercial Lifestyle Home & Garden* section

Final Thoughts

"Plants are solar powered air purifiers whose filter never needs replacing."

Khang Kijarro Nguyen



Chamaedorea



Dracaena