

Home/Garden

It's time to move the gardening indoors

As the autumn days dim and grow short and cold, there isn't much inclination or time to garden outside. Which certainly doesn't mean there's no gardening to be done - we just have to move to the windowsill.

Actually, windowsills aren't ideal places for houseplants at my house because I have baseboard hot water heating, which is efficient, but not beneficial to the plants located just above the heaters. That is one reason I like hanging plants. They are out of the way of heaters that go on and off all day and they have room to spread their vines, fronds and branches in airy beauty.

When you hang a plant in a window, the first thing to consider is the kind of light the window provides and the kind of light the plant needs. Don't despair if you don't have banks of south windows, because you will find that many plants do just fine with what is usually labeled "bright light". A north window provides bright light all day long. Plants that bloom will probably need some sun, at least four hours a day, and will thrive in an east or west window as well as a south window. In fact, some houseplants need to be shaded from direct, day long sun with a sheer curtain, or by being moved several feet into the room.

Different plants have different requirements for water and these requirements will vary with the size and type of pot (clay dries out much faster than plastic), the temperature and humidity of the room. When you do water, water thoroughly. Let water come out of the drainage holes and when it has stopped draining, dump that excess water out.

One easy-to-grow plant is the Wandering Jew which grows well in an east or west window where

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Between The Rows

it will have bright light and some sun. This single family, Zebrina, has several different cultivars. The trailing vines and leaves are similar but *Z. Purposii* is a deep winey-red, while *Z. Quadricolor* has silvery leaves striped with red, green and white. The most common variety has green and white-striped leaves.

Zebrinas need some sun every day to keep the colors deep and rich. Otherwise, they are not very particular. They will adapt to average household temperatures and should be watered when dry. Only fertilize when they are actively growing and pinch them back periodically to keep the plant bushy and full. After two years or so you'll want to take cuttings of the mature plant and start over again.

The first hanging plant I ever grew was the spider plant *Chlorophytum comosum* which has long narrow arching leaves. When it becomes pot bound, it will start to send out shoots with little baby spider plants that hang around the edge of the mama who is as prolific as she is graceful. Spider plants are also useful. Tests have shown that they help purify the air of pollutants like formaldehyde. Formaldehyde is used in the manufacture of plywood, pressboard and other items used at home, but the fumes can trigger allergic reac-

tions.

Spider plants do well in bright or even medium light, tolerate dry air and should be watered only when the soil has dried out. In the spring and through the summer, fertilize it every two or three weeks.

The lipstick plant *Aeschynanthus radicans* has succulent shiny leaves and produces red, yellow or orange tubular flowers. Some varieties bloom year round. However, the lipstick plant needs warmth and moisture to do really well, even though sunlight is not essential. Daytime temperatures of 75 or more are good, and no less than 65 at night. Keep the potting soil moist and fertilize once a month.

In spite of its unattractive name, the rattail cactus *Aporocactus*, produces beautiful flowers on hanging "rattails" that take several forms, some more drooping and some more sculptural. It needs full sun to produce its bright red or pink flowers which may go on blooming for as long as two months. It needs sun, but during the winter, it prefers nighttime temperatures of 60 degrees or a little less. Water when dry. During the spring and summer, when it's growing most actively you'll need to water it much more, keeping the soil moist. Fertilize every two weeks. The rattails can grow as long as 3 feet and are quite striking, especially when tipped with the beautiful blossom.

Whether you like interesting foliage, succulents or flowers, there are a variety of plants that will live happily and beautifully in a hanging basket at your window.

Sources: California Epi Center, P.O. Box 1431, Vista, CA 92083. Catalog \$1. Logee's Greenhouses, 55 North Street, Danielson, CT 06239. Catalog \$3.

