

# Home/Garden

## Making scents: Fragrant plants for the indoor gardener

Fragrance is fashionable. In addition to perfumes, stores offer potpourris, sachets, scented drawer liners, aromatic candles and even mixtures that get stirred into water and heated on the stove to fill your house with spicy scents.

Pat Leuchtman



Between The Rows

Many gardeners plan their gardens to include plants that are notable for their scent — roses, lilies, lavender, dianthus, stocks, nicotiana and others — but the windowsill gardener can also enjoy fragrant plants.

The gardenia produces wonderful fragrant flowers on a beautiful plant with dark shiny leaves. They are commonly available at florists and even at supermarket flower departments. In spite of their ready availability, gardenias are not easy to grow indoors. I have known people who are successful with gardenias, and if your house provides anything like their requirements, I wouldn't discourage you.

Gardenias need lots of bright light and sun. They also require cool nighttime temperatures of 60 degrees before they will set buds. During the day temperatures can rise into the 70s. Finally, an they need an acid soil that can be maintained with an acid fertilizer and lot of humidity. Most of the people I have met with healthy gardenia plants have used a humidifier.

Recently I heard about a less demanding plant, *Mitrostigma axillare*, which is sometimes called the African gardenia. The scent is not as strong as the true gardenia's, but to some people this might be an advantage. Nor are the flowers as large, but they are pretty and are produced year-round.

The African gardenia does not grow quickly, and will never be more than three feet tall, but even a young plant will produce fragrant white blossoms touched with pink. It will tolerate drier air, very cool temperatures at night and does not need an acid soil.



Recorder/Lucia Russom

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Another slow growing tree is the sweet olive, *Osmanthus fragrans*. The small umbels of creamy white flowers appear all year. They're not very striking, but the fragrance is wonderfully rich. The sweet olive needs full sun, will tolerate very cool temperatures (dipping below 50 degrees), but does need humidity.

### Citrus plants

Citrus plants are also famous for their fragrance. One of best houseplant citrus is *C. x limonia* which has a compact growth habit, blossoms

that appear from spring through the fall and ornamental sour oranges. Citrus plants need sun and tolerate night time temperatures between 50 and 65 degrees. They need to be fertilized every six weeks, preferably with an acid houseplant fertilizer. Like the gardenia, *C. x limonia* will suffer from chlorosis — yellowing of the foliage — if the soil is not kept acid.

Satinwood, *Murraya paniculata*, is another member of the citrus family

that resembles the common *Ficus benjamina*. It does not absolutely require a lot of sun although it will bloom more abundantly in bright light. Also, it's more tolerant of low humidity than other citrus plants which is a blessing. Sometimes satinwood is called the orange jasmine because the waxy flowers which appear in late winter and spring have a strong orange blossom fragrance.

I'd like to mention a fragrant vine that can be trained around a window

— stephanotis. This trailing plant is a standard in bridal bouquets. The large waxy trumpets smell sweetly of spiced apples. The flowers are heavy, produced on hoyia-like vines so it's important to provide them with a strong trellis to climb around a sunny window.

Stephanotis likes warm temperatures, never falling below 60 degrees at night, and doesn't mind dry air too much. It needs to be fertilized every other week or so during the summer to keep it healthy and vigorous. Flowers usually appear in June, the bride's month.

full sun and they should be fertilized once a month during the spring and summer. Water them as soon as the top of the soil is dry.

Whether you choose a plant for fragrant blossoms or foliage, you can add a sweet dimension to your windowsill garden.

Sources: Your local nursery or Kartuz Greenhouses, 1408 Sunset Drive, Vista, CA 92083; Logees Greenhouses, 55 North Street, Danielson, CT 06239 (catalog \$3).

### Scented geraniums

Scented geraniums, *pelargoniums*, are popular not because they produce sweetly fragrant flowers, but because their foliage is scented. You can have your choice of rose, mint, lemon, apple, orange and pine scented geraniums. Many of these scented leaves can be used in potpourri.

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