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COLUMNS

Trending, classic, and quirky: Houseplants to gift for the holidays

Liz Nye Special to the Telegram & Gazette

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As “stick season” sets in, New Englanders are forced to accept the reality that our need for green can no longer be easily satisfied outdoors. But as we face a long dark winter, houseplants step up to fill the chlorophyll void. For many people, houseplants provide a sought-after connection to nature as well as a sense of calm and even purpose. Take the Millennial generation’s love of houseplants, which has gone so far as to popularize the concept of “plant parenthood.” If you talk to your houseplants, give them names, feel pride in their growth and grief at their losses, you’re not alone.

Enthusiasm for houseplants grew back in the Victorian era when large glass windows and more sophisticated climate control made life inside doable, especially for tropical species that were being taken from British colonies and brought to England. Wardian cases, small terrariums that created humid conditions, allowed plants like ferns and orchids to be transported and grown in cooler, drier climates. And as homes continued to change to suit the needs of plants, some plants even received common names based on their adaptability to the home and their preferences indoors, like the rugged cast-iron plant (*Aspidistra elatior*) and the radiator plant (*Peperomia* spp.).

Houseplant trends have shifted in and out and then back into fashion in the decades since becoming mainstream. African violets were popular in the 1950s and '60s. Anything that could hang in a macrame basket was emblematic of the

1970s. Rubber plant was popular in the 1980s, and palms will forever be associated with trips to shopping malls in the 1990s. While iconic houseplants provide nostalgia, others inspire joy as literal heirlooms. Our most treasured plants often have sentimental histories. They originated as leaf cuttings from plants that once brightened the home of our grandmother's best friend's neighbor. For these reasons and more, it's always exciting to discover new houseplant varieties, revive old favorites, and, of course, share them with the people in our lives.

Plants Trending Now

There's something innately captivating about massive leaves. Not only can a houseplant with large leaves hide that dent in your wall, but it can also create a wondrously Jurassic-like aesthetic that feels ancient and modern at the same time. Some of the most popular large-leaved houseplants belong to a plant family commonly referred to as aroids. They are known for flowers that appear on an inflorescence called a spadix — think peace lilies. Aroids like monstera, philodendron, and alocasiasurged in popularity during the pandemic, and they continue to trend today. Their distinctive leaves range in size, shape, and color from the popular "Swiss cheese" leaf of the *Monstera adansonii* to the deep blue and silver foliage of *Alocasia* 'Silver Dragon.'**Classics with a Twist**

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Pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*), also aroids, have been popular houseplants for decades. A vining habit makes them perfect for hanging baskets or draped from mantles, bookshelves, or desks. Cultivars like 'Neon' and 'Marble Queen' offer vibrant variations on a classic appearance. While pothos are known as easy growers, without enough light, vining tendrils lose leaves. If this happens, don't be afraid to cut these sections back. Hoya is another classic vining plant. Also called wax plant, these are great for beginners. They're pretty low-maintenance, can tolerate drying out, and, when pleased with their care, reward you with

clusters of star-shaped flowers. *Hoya* 'Sunrise,' an especially beautiful choice, exhibits a warm, reddish blush on its foliage. Hoya and pothos are both easy to propagate, so they're the gift that keeps giving.

Bold Options

For plant lovers looking for something not found in every living room, rose cactus (*Rhodocactus grandifolius*) warrants consideration. This unusual leafy cactus features broad, flat foliage like rhododendron, thorny branches, and delicate, rose-like flowers. *Anthurium wendlingeri* is a little trickier to care for but visually very interesting as well. This epiphyte has long strappy leaves and a spiraling inflorescence. And for those with a desire for the strange, nothing beats a carnivorous plant. Tropical pitcher plants (*Nepenthes* spp.) do well in warm, humid locations, and when summer finally rolls around again, they — like many of us — will appreciate spending the season outdoors.

Gardening Central Mass. offers ecologically focused tips and helpful stories for home gardeners from the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill team. Located in Boylston, New England Botanic Garden creates experiences with plants that inspire people and improve the world. Learn more at nebg.org. The column is published on the third Sunday of the month.