

# Indoor Green

## The Natural Charm of House Plants

BY DEREK THOMAS

On a recent, rather frigid, evening outing down Pennsylvania Ave., I was struck by the very green windows of Frager's hardware store. The houseplant display was as welcoming as a lighthouse beacon on a dark sea.

Both Frager's (1115 Penn. Ave. SE) and Gingko Gardens (911 11th St. SE) have everything you need to spruce up your indoor plantscape. The folks at both of these garden centers are well trained and able to help you with your pots and pruning, potting mix and fertilizers. The plant department at Frager's in the winter months is an over-stuffed aisle filled with lush foliage and numerous garden supplies. Gingko Gardens is a wonderful urban garden center with Victorian shabby-chic vibe that is best experienced in person. The inside shop is crammed full of lush orchids, foliage plants and even terrarium conservatories. Gingko Gardens has a plant repotting service which can be particularly useful with large plants and trees, or those that are susceptible to breakage such as jade trees.

### Plant Care Primer

#### Pruning

Most plants, during winter, have slowed or stopped growing due to shorter days. In February the days are beginning to get noticeably longer to you and your photosynthesizing friends. Therefore pruning any unwanted stray limbs in February will be perfectly timed for the new explosion of growth.

#### Re-potting

Container-grown indoor plants will benefit from repotting every two to three years. The proper size to pot up to is about 2 to 4 inches larger than the container the plant is currently in. Resist the temptation to plant in a container that is bigger since soils can sour and roots will not grow into the soured soil. This is a good time to remove about thirty percent of the existing soil. Remove any white build up that has happened to the top of the root mass since this white substance is salt residue from commercial fertilizers. When placing your transplant in the new container make sure that the soil line is maintained. Do not plant the plant deeper than it sat in its old container.

#### Dividing

When repotting if the plant is multi-stemmed,

it may be a candidate for division. Dividing your houseplants is a great way to get more plants for you and your friends. Some plants can be divided by hand and others may need to be divided with pruners or a sharp knife. Make sure when dividing a plant each new plant has enough root mass to be self-supporting. Some plants will let you know when it is time to divide because portions of the otherwise healthy plant will start to show signs of yellowing leaves. When a plant that is multi-stemmed seems to be rising out of the pot, that is usually a good indication that it is time to divide. Keep in mind the new plants will need a new pot that is the same size or slightly smaller to prevent the souring of soil and rotting of the roots.

#### Cleaning

Houseplants should be cleaned regularly. Using a clean, damp cloth with a little dish soap will do the job. Clean a second time with plain water to make sure that the soap residue is removed. If there is a large build up of dust, you can put the entire plant in the shower and give it a lukewarm shower before cleaning the leaves. Don't use plant polishing products since they create an unhealthy residue that can block the absorption of light. Plants with fuzzy or furry leaves should not be washed. You can use a pipe cleaner or a can of forced air to remove the dust from their leaves. There is a great benefit to keeping the leaves clean since

a clean, dust free leaf can photosynthesize better than a dirty one.



Elizabeth Philbrick, manager of Frager's Garden shop. Photo: Andrew Lightman.



Mark Holler, Owner of Gingko Gardens. Photo: Andrew Lightman.



## Adding a plant to the collection

The following plants are easy care, beautiful additions to any indoor plantscape.


*Ficus lyrata*, Fiddle leaf fig. This plant has large dramatic violin-shaped leaves. Mature leaves can reach 10 inches by 15 inches large with, beautiful veined and puckered textures. Fiddle leaf figs are very easy to grow. Give them bright indirect sunlight. Provide with an organic rich potting medium. Let the plant dry slightly between watering. Over-watering will cause leaf drop and could lead to root rot. Fertilize in spring through fall with a complete indoor plant fertilizer. Watch for scale and spider mites.

*Dracaena marginata*. Dracaenas are tough spike-leaved plants with many different varieties. The *D. marginata* is a beautiful houseplant that can reach 10 feet tall indoors. The leaves are glossy green, edged in purple. Give the plant bright indirect light, typical indoor temperatures, and moist well-drained soil.

*Dracaena massangeana*, Corn plant. This is a widely used commercial plant that has gained in popularity due largely to its ease of care and minimal light requirements. Care is the same a *D. marginata*. Be especially careful of over-watering.

*Schefflera*, Umbrella tree. This wide-spreading, quick-growing tree will easily reach 10 to 12 feet. Bright light and moderate moisture with regular fertilization will help this specimen grow into even the largest of spaces quite rapidly. If possible move to a sheltered outdoor space during the warm months. If and when this plant gets too large, cutting it down will cause it to become multi-stemmed at the point where it is cut. Prune in late winter for best results. Watch for scale and spider mites.

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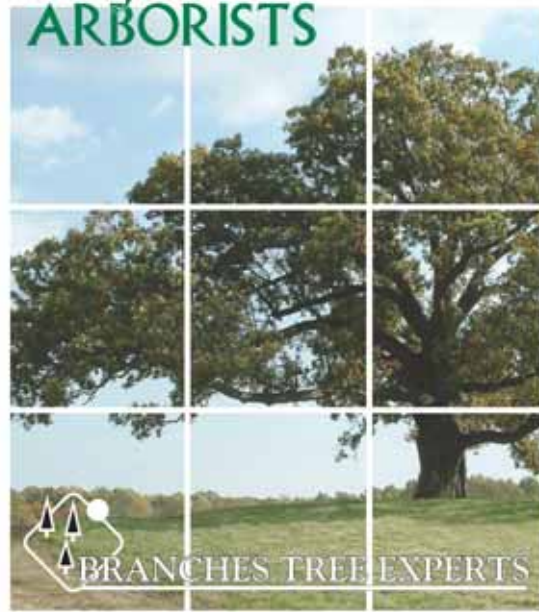
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