



## Happiness is Growing

By Carl Johnson, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

This past year has been a dark one for Connecticut and the world as a whole. Sickness, death, and civil unrest have plagued the country and left those of us lucky enough to still be here, feeling uneasy at best. One of the major side effects of this virus has been an increased amount of time spent at home and less time out in public. This has led to an increased need and desire to improve our living spaces and what better way to do that than to add some plants.

Exposure to nature and the outdoors has been proven to increase happiness, productivity, and overall well-being in humans. Studies have shown that workers in windowless settings, without any exposure to the natural world, are far less happy with their jobs and work environments than those who have at least some nature exposure throughout their day. It stands to reason that when your home becomes your office, as is the case for many of us currently, adding plants and bringing nature in, will bring the same benefits as it does in the work office.

Interiorscaping, the art of decorating with plants indoors, has had several renaissance periods. One occurred during the industrial revolution. Another happened in the late 60s and early 70s as lush, exotic interiors featuring shag rugs and tropical plants came into style. The baton has most recently been passed to millennials who, as a result of increased housing prices, have looked for ways to make the most out of the space they have, especially in urban environments. This most recent boom in the houseplant industry began several years ago, but in the past year things have really blossomed.

Big box stores have reacted to this by expanding their houseplant offerings while smaller, niche plant shops, like Logee's greenhouse in Danielson, have experienced an uptick in the sales of their rarer specimens. One thing of particular interest that is being seen in the niche plant market is a sharp rise in the price of "collectors plants". Plants such as the Pink Princess Philodendron, which was once appreciated as a sort of novelty, with its splashes of hot pink variegation, has become a commodity among houseplant fanatics. Specimens of this plant and others, such as the coveted Monstera 'Thai Constellation', are now fetching hundreds of dollars for even the smallest specimens, leaving many sellers unable to meet the sharp rise in demand. Online

communities built around the collecting and cultivation of these rare specimens have become a common sight on the internet.

Not everyone has the resources or know how to raise that pricey of a plant specimen. Most of us just want to add a little bit of living green to our space. Successfully growing plants in the home can be a very satisfying experience but it can also yield disappointment. Many of the warm climate plants we may select for our indoor settings are not well adapted to the New England household environment. Often, plants come with tags that will explain what sort of conditions that particular species is suited for, a quick Google search can also yield a wealth of information on any of the more popular houseplants available these days.

For the dryer home that receives a lot of full sun, year round, cacti and succulents are a great choice. Also suited for these conditions, but with more of a leafy houseplant feel, is the croton, known for its waxy leaves with bright splashes of color, these plants are a great addition to your room décor. Full sun conditions are not always common as many Connecticut homes are surrounded by tall trees, which leads to less sunlight filtering in through the windows. A tried and true option for lower light/partial shade is the sanseveria that comes in a wide variety of shapes and sizes depending on the species. These plants bridge the gap between succulent and leafy with their thick leathery foliage. The monstera, sometimes called the swiss cheese plant due to the naturally occurring holes in its leaves, has been popular in homes and offices for decades. This is due largely in part to the fact that it is both attractive to the eye and adaptable to the indoors. If you feel unsure about what might work in your space, it can be helpful to ask the growers at your local nursery, these people have experience and know how that can take you a long way in getting your houseplant journey started.

The feeling of providing for something living, in this case a plant, and seeing it thrive (hopefully) is something that can be extremely rewarding. It satisfies an innate need and invigorates the human spirit. When we are successful with our plants, we feel accomplished, when we fail, we are challenged; both feelings are engaging and fulfilling in their own way. This kind of interaction is something that can't be replaced by all the digital entertainment in the world. Of the bright spots that can be found among the rubble of this past year, I count the budding indoor gardens of new enthusiasts, and the ever expanding collections of houseplant veterans as a shining star.

For questions about caring for your houseplants or on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.



