

## FRAGRANT INDOOR PLANTS

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Growing plants indoors is a fascinating activity enjoyed by many people of all ages and occupations. In addition to the beauty and great diversity of form offered by the plant kingdom, another aspect often overlooked but equally if not more pleasurable, is that of fragrance. There are many species of plants which will stimulate and delight our senses of sight and smell. This paper will list, describe, and discuss the culture of a number of such fragrant plants.

*Ardisia crispa* (Coral Berry) is a graceful, slow growing shrub eventually reaching four feet. Its leaves are long (to four inches), narrow, thick, leathery, and shining dark green with crisped margins. The clusters of bright scarlet waxy berries often persist until the next flowering season. This is a most handsome pot plant for the greenhouse or home. Grow in a loam or peat-based mix and shade from hottest sun. Soil should be kept evenly moist. Propagate by lateral shoots taken as cuttings from spring to autumn, or by seeds in spring. The latter method provides the best plants. (References: 3, 4)

*Asparagus sprengeri* (Asparagus Fern) is a fluffy-looking plant ideal for hanging baskets. It has many branching and arched stems which are set with soft, fresh green needles or cladodes, true leaves are reduced to thorns. The small, white to pinkish flowers are fragrant, though infrequently produced, and are followed by red berries which contain seed. For propagation these seeds may be planted or large plants may be divided with a knife or hatchet as the roots are tuberous, get heavily matted, and are difficult to divide. These plants grow well in bright light, though not direct summer sun, and prefer average soil with peat moss added. A cool night temperature and good air circulation are best. Plants will drop their "needles" if the temperature gets too warm or they are allowed to dry out. (References: 1, 2, 3, 4)

*Babiana* is a genus of attractive bulbous plants with 3-12 inch stems rising from small corms with tapering, pleated leaves. The flowers are brightly colored, often with several different colors on the same blossom. They are best grown in pots of loam-based compost and placed in the cool greenhouse for they require fresh air and full sun. Pot the corms in October and keep just moist. Increase watering when in full leaf and flower. When the leaves turn yellow, dry off and store in the pots. Repot annually and propagate by removing cormlets then.

*Babiana plicata* is a fragrant species with a clove-carnation scent. The flowers are a light violet-blue and grow to a height of about six inches. They open in May and June.

*B. sambucina* is a species with fragrance like European Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) flowers. The blossoms are blue-purple and appear in April and May.

*B. stricta* (Baboon Flower) is the most colorful species having multi-colored, fragrant two inch flowers, winter to May. The three outer petals are white, the three inner blue, with a dark blotch at the base. They are borne on stems about 12 inches high. (References: 3, 4)

*Boronia* is a genus of graceful, evergreen shrubs, most of which have fragrant blooms and light, dissected foliage. They grow well in pots of soil rich in humus, peat, or other organic matter in the cool greenhouse (nights 40-45°F), and may be placed outside from July to September. Under glass, ventilate freely whenever possible and water sparingly. Propagate by seeds in spring or cuttings of lateral shoots with a heel in summer.

*Boronia elatior* is a dense shrub reaching a maximum height of five feet. The shoots are thickly furnished with spreading hairs, lacy, fresh-green pinnate foliage with needle-like leaflets, and in May, numerous attractive nodding globose 1/4 inch fragrant flowers along the stem, carmine-red and often of different colors on the same plant.

*B. megastigma* is a smaller shrub, attaining only two feet with the leaves divided into three narrow, linear leaflets. The solitary flowers which open in spring, are maroon-purple outside and yellow inside and are borne on long spikes. They have an intense perfume. (References: 3, 4)

*Carissa grandiflora* (Natal Plum) is a spiny, evergreen shrub naturally growing to five to seven feet. It has deep, glossy green oval leaves, two to three inches long, borne on branches which also carry forked spines. The white fragrant flowers have a short tube opening out to one to three inches across the lobes. They are in small clusters and open in May. In July they bear edible scarlet berries up to two inches in length. An attractive shrub for the cool greenhouse border or large pots and tubs. Use a peat-based soil and water freely during the summer, less at other times. Ventilating on warm days and provide light shade during the hottest months. Propagate by seeds sown when ripe or in the spring, or by lateral cuttings, preferably with a heel, in summer.

*C. acocanthera* is an evergreen shrub with large four inch leathery, long elliptic, glossy green leaves. Plants bear axillary panicles of very fragrant tubular shining white flowers with star-like spreading lobes which are lightly hairy outside.

*C. spectabilis* (Wintersweet) is an evergreen shrub with narrow, oval, leathery, glossy leaves and clusters of sweetly-scented, pure-white flowers. (References: 3, 4)

*Cattleya* is a genus of superb, tropical orchids which in cultivation need to be kept moist. The humid atmosphere of a warm greenhouse or daily misting with warm water in the window garden may enhance growth. Each bulb bears one to three fleshy leaves and magnificent flowers which in some species measure eight inches across and are often deeply fragrant. They will take full sun in winter but should be shaded from spring until early autumn. A compost of two parts osmunda fibre and one part sphagnum moss is recommended. Keep cooler and expose to full light in autumn for flower bud initiation. Propagate by division in spring or summer. (References: 3, 5)

*Cestrum parqui* (Willow-leaved Jessamine) is a shrub with willow-like bright green leaves that are graceful and trailing. Annually, in midwinter, greenish-yellow tubular flowers with spreading lobes, in profuse clusters are borne. They are intensely fragrant at night. Needs filtered sun and ample humidity. A day and night temperature of 70°F is ideal. Soil should dry between waterings. (References: 3, 5)

*Citrus* is a genus of evergreen shrubs and small trees including the commercial citrus fruits--orange, lemon, and grapefruit. Young plants of most species make excellent foliage pot plants for indoor growing, but when more mature need a greenhouse to fruit. Those which are recommended for indoor growing and will both flower and fruit at a small size are *Citrus aurantium* (Seville Orange), *C. 'Meyeri'* (Meyer Lemon), *C. mitis* (Calamondin Orange), *C. limonia ponderosa* (Ponderosa Lemon), and *C. taitensis* (Otaheite Orange). Citrus flowers are very sweet smelling and many have foliage which is aromatic when crushed. All require full sun and average room temperatures (approx. 70°F) with cool nights (to 10 degrees lower). An acid-type fertilizer should be used every few weeks. Blossoms appear between December and March usually but variation is frequent on indoor specimens. To assure the setting of fruit, flowers should be hand-pollinated when the pollen on the stamens is ripe. Ventilate freely whenever possible and ideally stand outside in a sheltered sunny place from May until September. Propagation is by cuttings taken from half-ripened wood of plants that have already fruited, or quite readily from seeds. (References: 2, 3, 4)

*Coelogyne cristata* is a very good orchid for indoor culture, thriving on a cool window sill. They should be grown in equal parts osmunda fibre and sphagnum moss. The pseudobulbs carry thin, narrow leaves to 12 inches long and pendulous clusters of sweetly fragrant three to five inch flowers which are pure white with orange markings on the lip. They open from December to March. Shade from direct sunshine and maintain a humid atmosphere ideally in summer. Propagate by division in spring or when young growths are visible. (Reference: 4)

*Cymbidium* is a popular genus of orchid for cool greenhouse conditions. The beautifully shaped and subtly colored flowers are much in demand by florists. The tougher species mentioned here may also be grown in the home. Shade from hot sun in summer but expose to autumn sun to promote flowering. Propagate by division at repotting time after flowering. A suitable potting mix would be equal parts loam, fibre or shredded bark, osmunda fibre, and sphagnum moss.

*Cymbidium eburneum* is a delightfully fragrant species flowering in March to June. It has two to three creamy white flowers with a yellow-marked lip on each 8-12 inch stem, and long, narrow, bright green leaves.

*C. giganteum* is a large-flowered fragrant species. The two to three foot arching stem bears seven to fifteen blooms in autumn, each four to five inches across, light yellow-green and purple markings, with a yellow lip blotched with a bright reddish brown. The stems and long, sword-like leaves grow from a six-inch pseudobulb.

*C. tracyanum* is a very distinctively marked species. The four-five inch fragrant flowers are brown and red striped on a yellow background. The hairy lobed lip has similar coloration with a white fringed margin. The blooms are borne on two-foot stems between November and January. (Reference: 4)

*Datura* is a genus of mainly shrubby plants with bold foliage and striking trumpet-shaped flowers in shades of cream, white and red. All the species described here may be grown in tubs or large pots in the warm greenhouse, but are best grown in the greenhouse border. Prune back the flower shoots to a short stub in late winter. Propagate by cuttings in spring.

WARNING: *All portions of these plants are poisonous if ingested.*

*Datura arborea* (Angel's Trumpet) is a shrub or small tree reaching 10 feet, softly hairy all over with ovate leathery leaves. The flowers are white, pendent and trumpet-like, six inches long, beautifully fragrant, especially in the late evening, and produced in August.

*D. cornigera* is a downy shrub, reaching to 10 feet, having large ovate leaves and ivory pendent flowers which are strongly fragrant at night.

*D. meteloides* is a perennial to three feet, cultivated as an annual, grayish-pubescent with ovate leaves and erect, five-lobed funnel-shaped flowers to eight inches long, white tinged with violet, and fragrant.

*D. suaveolens* is a large 6-15 foot tree-like shrub. It has 12 inch smooth leaves sometimes downy beneath. The pendent, showy, white flowers reach 12 inches in length and are very fragrant. They open in August. (References: 3, 4)

*Dendrobium nobile* is a showy orchid suitable for growing in the home. It bears an abundance of two-three inch fragrant flowers. Each blossom has white petals suffused pink or lilac, and a yellow lip bearing a deep velvety-maroon blotch at the throat and a pink to purple margin. They are borne from January to March on 18 inch bulbs, together with the bright green leaves. Propagate by division just as the young shoots appear, using a soil mix of three parts osmundafibre to one part sphagnum moss. Keep shaded and humid during the summer allowing more light in autumn. (Reference: 4)

*Ervatamia coronaria* (Crape Jasmine) is a handsome five-eight foot shrub, reminiscent of a gardenia, having glossy green, elliptic leaves three to five inches long. The one and a half to two inch waxy white flowers have wavy-edged petals and are borne in small clusters. It is a very fragrant species, especially at night. Grow in tubs of a loam-based or proprietary peat mix and shade from direct sun in summer. Maintain humidity and ventilate on warm days. Propagate by lateral stem cuttings, preferably with a heel, in summer. (Reference: 4)

*Freesia x hybrida* is a large-flowered strain of hybrids which are bulbous plants with beautifully scented flowers much in demand for house decoration. They have long, narrow, sword-like leaves and slender, branching stems which carry the one to two inch funnel-shaped flowers. They are best suited to cool greenhouse culture as they prefer good air circulation. The corms should be planted in a loam-based mix. Offsets may be separated from the corms in late summer. (References: 3, 4)

*Gardenia jasminoides* (Cape Jasmine) is a beautiful one to six foot evergreen shrub for the home or greenhouse. It has glossy, dark green, long-oval leaves and three-inch white waxy flowers which are superbly perfumed. They are carried singly towards the apex of the branches, predominately from May to September. Ideal conditions include full sun in winter, shade in summer, high humidity, and a temperature of 60°F at night and 70°F by day. Soil should be well-drained, organic and

acid. Never let dry completely between waterings. Gardenias are very particular plants. The buds may drop at the slightest provocation. If the buds yellow, plants may be cold or over-watered. Plants will greatly benefit from summering outdoors in a shade location. They like good air circulation. Propagation is by cuttings. (References: 1, 4, 5)

*Hamatocactus setispinus* is a cactus notable for its attractive spines and freedom of flowering. The spherical stems, which lengthen with age, have 13-15 wavy ribs. The wooly white areoles bear 12-15 white or brownish radial spines about 1 1/4 inches long and up to three white central spines, longer, stouter, and hooked at the tips. The fragrant flowers are tubular and yellow with glowing scarlet throats, about three inches long and follow each other in quick succession. Ideally they prefer cool temperatures at night (50-55°F), fresh air, soil with good drainage, full sun, and the soil should be allowed to thoroughly dry between soakings. (References: 3, 4)

*Heliotropium x hybridum* (Cherry Pie) is a favorite, very fragrant house plant which can also be grown in the cool greenhouse. It has dark to mid-green oval leaves which are closely veined and wrinkled. The dense flat clusters of flowers can measure six inches across and range in color from lavender-pink to violet. White forms are also grown. The main flowering season is summer and early autumn, but they can flower at any time of the year. Grow in a good loam-based or soilless mix in four to six inch pots and bring into a warm place to induce flowering. Shade from strongest summer sun and keep moist. They are best repotted annually in spring. Propagate by stem cuttings in autumn or early spring. (Reference: 4)

Hoya is a genus of evergreen, climbing or trailing plants with flexible stems and leathery or fleshy shiny leaves and clusters of star-like, waxy flowers. They make good greenhouse and house plants and are best trained up supports. Grow in a loam-based or proprietary peat mix and shade from hottest sunshine in summer. Keep humid, but allow to be cooler and drier in winter. Propagate by stem cuttings in summer or by layering.

*Hoya bella* is a dwarf, spreading, shrub-like species with pendulous branches. It grows well in a hanging basket. The small, dark green leaves are narrowly oval, occasionally with white spotting. The fragrant white flowers have a red-purple center and are borne in wide clusters in the axils of the leaves from May to September.

*H. carmosa* (Wax Plant) is a good house plant with mid-green fleshy leaves growing on long stems, climbing by means of aerial roots. The flowers are pinkish-white with a red star-shaped marking in the center and are fragrant, opening from May to September. (Reference: 4)

*Jasminum polyanthum* is a freely blooming shrubby plant which climbs rapidly. Its branches are red and glabrous, having small pinnate leaves of five-seven lanceolate leaflets. Early in the year it produces masses of deliciously scented flowers which are white inside and rosy outside. Plants need full sun, a loam-based soil mix, fresh circulating air, and prefer soil to be kept evenly moist. (Reference: 3)

*Mahernia verticillata* (Honey Bells) is a rambling bush with fern-like lacy foliage which climbs and trails. Clusters of 3/4 inch, nodding, golden-yellow, bell-shaped flowers which are very fragrant (like lily-of-the-valley) appear among the trailing stems in winter and spring. Plants should be given full sun in a south window of the home or in the greenhouse, and semi-shade during its summer rest period of reduced growth. Keep evenly moist for they require more water than average. Loam-based soil rich in humus is ideal. Propagation is easy from stem cuttings stuck in soil, sand, vermiculite, or other rooting media. (References: 3, 5)

*Myrtus communis microphylla* (Dwarf Myrtle) is the compact form of myrtle grown by Europeans in pots and sheared into little globes and used for weddings. Each dense bush is covered with small, needle-like, shiny black-green aromatic leaves. The plant is starved with deeply scented white flowers in summer and fall. When blossoms fade, blue berries take their place and last well into the winter. Prune to keep neat and shapely. Give bright sun and let dry moderately between waterings. Preferred temperature is 55-60°F. Propagation is by four to six inch cuttings taken in spring. (References: 3, 5)

*Osmanthus fragrans* (Sweet Olive) is an evergreen Asiatic tree that can be grown as a pot plant when small. It has holly-shaped, stiff, leathery, olive-green leaves finely toothed at the margins, and strongly fragrant clusters of tiny white flowers that bloom all year. Keep it in a cool place that gets direct sunlight. Soil should have a high clay content but drain well. Keep it evenly moist and fertilize monthly. This plant is frequently grown in semitropical gardens as a hedge or specimen shrub where thick, dense growth is needed. (References: 2, 3)

*Passiflora* (Passion Flower) is a genus of evergreen, tendril-climbing vines with showy flowers consisting of a number of regular petals making a star or bowl-shaped flower with a central crown bearing an outward radiating fringe of thread-like filaments around the stalk supporting the ovary and stamens. They are best planted in the greenhouse border but can be grown in pots or tubs in a loam-based mix. Those mentioned here can be kept as houseplants if placed outdoors in a sunny location for the summer and kept in a sunny window for the winter with less water. The plant will not thrive in the home during the winter months, but it will survive to bear magnifi-

cent blooms when there is ample light. They need training up light supports and will become entangled in other plants if not checked. Propagate by cuttings of stem sections in July or August, or by seed.

*Passiflora x alato-caerulea* is a free-blooming hybrid well known because of its large and showy, fragrant, axillary, four-inch flowers with white sepals, pink petals, and a fringed crown which is purple, white, and blue. The leaves are trilobed.

*Passiflora caerulea* (Blue Passion Flower) has five to seven lobed leaves which are bright green and up to seven inches across. The solitary, slightly fragrant flowers are produced from June to September. The petals and the central ovary and stamens are pure white, while the filaments are a contrasting deep blue fading to white toward the center, but with deep violet at the base. The plant sometimes produces ovoid pale orange-yellow fruits 1-1 1/4 inch long.

*Passiflora laurifolia* (Jamaica Honeysuckle, Yellow Granadilla) has three-five inch long unlobed leaves which are oval, leathery, and shiny. The fragrant flowers are two-three inches across with petals green on the reverse and red inside. The filaments are purple, banded with white, blue and red. They are produced in June and July and are followed by yellow, ovoid fruits, two-three inches long, shaped somewhat like a lemon and edible. (References: 3, 4)

*Pittosporum tobira* is a tough, evergreen shrub branching into a rather flat-topped, shapely bush with thick, leathery obovate dark lustrous green leaves to four inches long, arranged in dense pseudowhorls. The flowers are small, creamy white, and very fragrant in terminal clusters. It prefers full sun, temperatures at night from 40 to 55°F, and a loam-based soil mix which is drenched thoroughly and then allowed to become moderately dry between waterings. (Reference: 3)

*Rosmarinus officinalis* (Rosemary) is an evergreen shrub with downy shoots well known as a sweet herb and grown for its deeply aromatic leaves which are needle-like and grayist, shiny above and white downy beneath. The flowers are light blue. It does best in a cool part of the greenhouse or window garden, but must have full sun. Ideal temperature is 60°F. Should be planted in a loam-based mix and never allowed to dry out. It grows to about 15 inches high. (References: 3, 5)

*Ruta graveolens* (Herb-of-Grace, Common Rue) is a strongly aromatic shrub to three feet high with two-three pinnate leaves which are used for seasoning food. Flowers are small and yellow in terminal clusters. This plant has been cultivated for centuries in herb gardens and its name was associated with repentance. It likes night temperatures of 50-55°F, full sun, and a loam-based soil kept evenly moist. (Reference: 3)

*Salvia dorisiana* is attractive both as a flowering and foliage plant. It has large velvety-green fragrant leaves, and rosy-red, bilabiate flowers on wiry stems.

*Salvia rutilans* (Pineapple Sage) grows to about 15 inches and has thin dark-green leaves which are very strongly pineapple scented. Flowers in tones of scarlet appear through the fall and winter. Minimum temperature is 60°F. Full sun in a south window with high humidity is ideal. If the temperature is too warm and dry, the blossoms will be small, few and scattered. Soil should be loam-based with organic matter added. Plants should be kept moist but never soggy. They need more water than average but should be allowed to moderately dry every two weeks or so. (References: 3, 5)

*Skimmia japonica* 'Dwarf Female' is a dioecious evergreen, broad compact shrub with thick, leathery, elliptic, glossy green leaves clustered at the end of branchlets and tipped by erect clusters of small, creamy-white fragrant flowers. These are followed by coral-red berries which last for months during winter and spring. It can be kept with difficulty as a house plant. Prefers night temperatures of 40 to 45°F, a loam-based soil mix which is kept evenly moist, and filtered light or that of an east or west window. (Reference: 3)

*Thevetia peruviana* (Yellow Oleander) is an evergreen shrub with linear, shiny leaves. The flowers are large, funnel-shaped, yellow and sweetly fragrant like a tea rose. It prefers warm night temperatures of 62-65°F and can be grown as a house plant. Use a loam-based soil mix. Keep evenly moist in full sun. (Reference: 3)

*Trachelospermum jasminoides* (Star Jasmine) is a tall woody Chinese vine with small leathery leaves. Heavy-textured starry white flowers with wavy lobes and a sweet lingering tropical scent first appear when the plant is small and young, and unfold continually all fall and into the winter. Needs light support to climb and should be pruned. Does well as a house plant in a south window with average house temperatures. Plant in a rich loam mix with good drainage. Summer outdoors if possible. (References: 3, 5)

## References

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