

JANUARY 2025

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Regional Magazine
of the Year 2024

velvet*

The BRIGHT SIDE Issue

HOMES | FOOD | CULTURE | PEOPLE | WELLBEING | STYLE

Happy Houseplants

To celebrate National Houseplant Week this January, Newmarket garden designer Melanie Taylor recommends five bright, beautiful and pet-safe plants to lift both your rooms and mood

The physical and mental health benefits of having houseplants came into sharp focus with Covid 19: in 2021, a Garden Centre Association study showed sales had soared by a staggering 50% since 2019. Whilst the numbers of 'plant parents' increased exponentially during lockdown, using houseplants to adorn our homes is rooted in the history of ancient civilisations. The Egyptians and Romans valued plants like papyrus and ivy for their decorative and medicinal uses. The Victorian craze for ferns known as Pteridomania (fern fever) became a national obsession which crossed the class divide. Easy to forage in the countryside, anyone could dig them up to enjoy at home. If caught, these 'fern gatherers' were charged with damaging hedgerows rather than stealing because legal protection for plants didn't exist back then.



Picture: RHS/Oliver Dixon



Picture: Melanie Taylor/Hazelwood Plantscapes

BELOW: A novel way of using cabinets to display houseplants by In the Garden Ltd, gold medal winners at RHS Chelsea 2024.

LEFT: To celebrate the joys of houseplants and indoor container gardening, a floral stilt walker performs on the exhibit at the In the Garden Ltd Houseplants & Container Gardening Houseplant Studio

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Whenever buying a new houseplant, it's worth researching the individual conditions it needs to avoid costly mistakes. It's important to feed and water each one correctly. Cold water can shock houseplants so water them with room temperature water, and if you have hard water like I do, then try to use rainwater or distilled water rather than tap water. For inspiration on curating and displaying your houseplant collection, look at the lovely verdant displays by gold-medal-winning design team 'In the Garden' at the **Houseplant Avenue at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2024**. The **Garden Museum's 2023 exhibition Cabinet Cultures** also revealed how humans connect with and attach value to

houseplants through a horticultural 'hack' of repurposing Ikea display cabinets to create mini greenhouses indoors. In addition to RHS Chelsea, if you can, visit the **RHS Malvern Spring Festival (May 8-11 2025)** or the Houseplant Café at **RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival (July 1-6 2025)** for a real celebration of indoor gardening. **Gardeners' World Live in Birmingham (June 12-15 2025)** also hosts the International Orchid Show, a Houseplant Hub and Houseplant Market alongside many unusual specimens inside the Floral Marquee. Whether your New Year's resolution is to give your houseplants more care, or to focus on your own wellness, I hope 2025 is filled with new opportunities to enhance your enjoyment of the natural world by bringing the outdoors in.

FIVE COLOURFUL HOUSEPLANTS TO HELP BANISH THE JANUARY BLUES



***Chlorophytum orchidastrum* 'Fire Flash':
Orange Spider Plant**

This tropical plant originated in East Africa, so needs a relatively humid environment and benefits from regular misting. It likes plenty of light but avoid direct midday sun as it can scorch the leaves. Its thick water-storing roots make it drought tolerant. It will grow to a height of 30-60cm and is easy to care for, simply water it well and leave the top half of the soil to dry out before watering again.



***Medinilla magnifica*: Rose Grape**

A sophisticated addition to your home, the stunning *Medinilla magnifica* hails from the Philippines and is famous for its cascading blooms that emerge from deep pink buds nestled amongst lush green foliage. Typically growing to 60cm (2ft) it can sometimes reach 90cm (3ft) so needs plenty of space to thrive. It can be quite challenging to care for but is worth the effort, needing bright filtered light and humidity to maintain its optimum microclimate. Ensure it has adequate drainage and only water once the top inch of soil is dry.



***Aeschynanthus radicans* 'Twister': Lipstick Plant**

This fabulous trailing plant, with its lipstick-shaped tubular flowers, is native to the rainforests of Southeast Asia so is best suited to a warm humid environment like a bathroom with indirect sunlight. It grows to a height and spread of 60cm by 60cm and is easy to propagate from stem cuttings. When watering, allow the pot to drain completely so that its roots don't rot from waterlogging. It doesn't like fluctuations in temperature so avoid placing it in a draught where it might shed its leaves. Pruning the stems back after flowering encourages new growth and more flowers.



***Iresine herbstii*: Herbst's Blood Leaf Plant**

If you want to add drama to your houseplant collection, the vibrant crimson hues of the *Iresine* instantly brighten any shelf. A surprisingly resilient plant, it's great for old and new plant lovers alike. Native to Brazil it needs bright indirect sunlight to maintain its intense colour and likes temperatures of 18-24 degrees C. It requires relatively high humidity so mist regularly, keep the soil consistently moist but ensure it doesn't become waterlogged. It grows quickly, is easy to propagate from cuttings and can be used outdoors as a summer bedding plant.

CENTRE PIC: *Aechmea x 'Pepita Elegant Flames'* With its vibrant flame-like red flower springing from a rosette of sword-like green leaves, this attractive bromeliad, marketed as 'Elegant Flame', is another easy-care plant. It needs little water, purifies the air and grows up to 50-70cm. Native to the tropical areas of Central and South America, it likes a humid environment and bright indirect light. It tolerates lower light levels, though will lose its vibrancy in shadier conditions. Flowering for several months, new offsets or 'pups' appear at the base once the central bract has finished blooming. Propagate new plants by separating the 'pups' and potting on once they are a third of the size of the original plant.

The term 'plantscaping' means to decorate with interior plants, so if you want advice on curating your own houseplant collection or help planning your outdoor spaces, reach out to Melanie using the contact form at hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk or by emailing melanie.taylor@hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk