

Cultural History of House Plants

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Commentary

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DESCRIPTION

A houseplant is a plant that is cultivated indoors, usually in settings like homes and workplaces, for ornamental purposes, but studies have shown that they can also have psychological benefits. They also aid in interior air purification, since some species and the soil-dwelling bacteria associated with them absorb volatile organic pollutants such as benzene, formaldehyde, and trichloroethylene, reducing indoor air pollution. While such contaminants are normally poisonous to humans, they are absorbed by the plant and its soil-dwelling bacteria without causing harm.

Ancient Egyptians and Sumerians used ornate pots to grow attractive and fruiting plants. Laurel trees were grown in clay pots by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Over 2,500 years ago, potted plants were displayed at garden displays in ancient China. Ornamental gardening was limited to monasteries during the middle Ages.

Plant collectors and wealthy merchants from Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium brought plants from Asia Minor and the East Indies during the Renaissance in the 15th and 16th centuries. *Senecio angulatus* was brought to Malta and the rest of Europe as an attractive plant in the 15th century.

The nobility of France and England developed an interest in exotic plants in the 16th century, with inventor and writer Sir Hugh Platt releasing Garden of Eden in 1660, a treatise describing how to cultivate plants in the house. There was no indication of houseplant culture in Central Europe until the 17th century. The poor level of life at the period is one explanation. Using the living room window sill as a plant shelter meant less light, less storage, and less mobility. There were hardly any plants in the typically gloomy and cold side rooms.

In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, plant breeding became popular. Plants were widely grown, and over 5,000 species were introduced to Europe by botanists and scholars from South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia. The botanical gardens and private court collections drew and displayed these developments. Flower tables were an element of salons around the end of the 18th century, when the bourgeois epoch began. In addition, nurseries supplied hundreds of plants in the 18th century, including citrus, jasmines, mignonette, bays, myrtles, agaves, and aloes.

Flowers on the Windowsill, 1884, in the nineteenth century. The middle class began to utilise houseplants in the gloomy and smoky Victorian era, which were seen as a symbol of social rank and moral worth, and were put on windows, in Wardian cases, trellises, and stands. Exotic and hardy foliage plants were popular because they could withstand the dark and cramped conditions found within a Victorian home. Palms (kentia palms and parlour palms), maidenhair ferns, geraniums, ferns, and aspidistras were popular plants on window sills and in drawing rooms at this time. At the end of the 19th century, the range already included begonias, orchids, cineraria, clivia, cyclamen and flamingo flowers, but also leafy ornamental plants such as ferns, silver fir, ornamental asparagus, lillium, snake plant, English Ivy and rubber tree.

Large, frequently floor-to-ceiling windows enabled a seamless transition from the interior to the garden in the early twentieth century, and architectural changes and the development of new glass production technologies meant that larger windows were employed, resulting in better illumination in living rooms. Following the Boer War in the Edwardian era, *Senecio angulatus* became popular in Queensland, where it was featured in garden pillars in Brisbane newspapers in the late 1900s.

Due to their cluttered popularity in the Victorian era, houseplants became dated in the early twentieth century. However, the golden pothos, Chinese evergreens, *Peperomia obtusifolia*, Boston ferns, cactus, and *Ficus elastica* had a modest presence throughout the first half of the century, but more so after World War II when houseplants became mainstream again.

From the 1950s until the 1990s, in the 1970s, spider plants were abundant, and they are still popular today. When the plant craze returned after WWII in the 1950s and 1960s, golden pothos, monstera, African violets, and Swedish ivy became popular. Plant care labels were first introduced in the 1960s. In the 1970s, garden centres were commonplace, and homes were commonly adorned with foliage-heavy plants in a "interior jungle" setting.

Philodendrons, string of hearts, Boston ferns, umbrella trees, syngoniums, tradescantias (wandering jews), kentia palms, Tahitian brides, spider plants, weeping figs, *Ficus lyrata*, *Ficus elastica*, dracaenas, aglaonemas, aluminium plants, and snake plants were all popular in the 1970s.

The lush tone began to fade in living rooms in the 1980s, when it was trendy to have only one or two large botanical plants, such as a ficus or yucca. Shopping malls, on the other hand, continued to be adorned with luxuriant vegetation. Moth orchids, as well as *Dracaena fragrans* and golden pothos, were popular in the 1990s and are still popular now. In the 1990s, there was also a surge in interest in artificial plants.

Lucky bamboos gained popular among customers in the 2000s. The mid-late 2010s and early 2020s were revivalist decades, with popular plants from previous decades (mentioned above) being resurrected and popularised thanks to social media. Peace lilies, prayer plants, ZZ plants, begonias, swiss cheese plants, crotons,

peperomias, pileas, air plants, hypoestes, cactus, Boston fern, and numerous succulent plants were popular houseplants throughout these decades (such as curio or senecios, euphorbias, sedums, schlumbergeras, hoyas, etc).

Furthermore, during the COVID-19 outbreak in the early 2020s, widespread interest in houseplants skyrocketed. Many individuals wanted to fill their houses with houseplants as they were compelled to spend more time indoors. In July 2021, plants were referenced on Instagram an average of over 3,000 times per day, with the plantmom being used over 2.6 million times. Pothos, monstera albo, cactus, philodendron, calathea, hoyas, and snake plants are among the most popular houseplants in 2021. Plant sales in 2020 were at an all-time high, raising worries about the industry's environmental effect.