

Heightened Senses: Be a plant parent

LET'S GET POTTY



Hardy plants to grow and flaunt on your 'Gram

Wilson Wong

Once regarded as a retiree's pastime, gardening has been embraced by millennials as a form of horticulture therapy to fight boredom and be connected to nature and people, instead of isolating themselves at home.

They generally go for rare, exotic plants which are regarded as collector's items. Plants must also look good.

Many plants in this category are often foliage ones, which feature attractive leaves. They look good all the time, without the need for flowers.

Variegated plants are those which have splashes of yellow, cream, white or even pink on their leaves. Such plants have immense decorative value.

An indoor garden can be as simple as having an arrangement of dish gardens or terrariums, or having potted plants around the area. The plants featured here are available at local nurseries such as Candy Floriculture or Far East Flora in Thomson Road and Sing See Soon Flora & Landscape in Simei.

For the beginner, choose more affordable versions instead of the rare and more costly variegated cultivars. Select plants that suit your home environment for higher success rates. Grow lights are available to gardeners who may not have sufficient sunlight at home. For more tips on indoor gardening, go to bit.ly/3xt2Rpk.

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CULINARY HERBS

What: Mint, basil, thyme, rosemary, bay and chives are herbs millennials who love to cook would want to grow. These plants are appreciated for the scent and flavour of their leaves. Even the mere act of brushing their leaves with the hand can be a form of aromatherapy.

Star plant: Pesto perpetuo basil (below) is a highly aromatic basil cultivar that is great for making pesto. Its variegated leaves are pretty to look at and good for garnishing a dish. More importantly, it is a basil that stays productive all the time as it does not flower and then declines.

Cost: Herb plants are usually priced from \$6 to \$12. Pesto perpetuo basil is available online from platforms such as Carousell.

Care tips: Like many herb plants, basil needs direct sunlight and to be kept moist at all times.



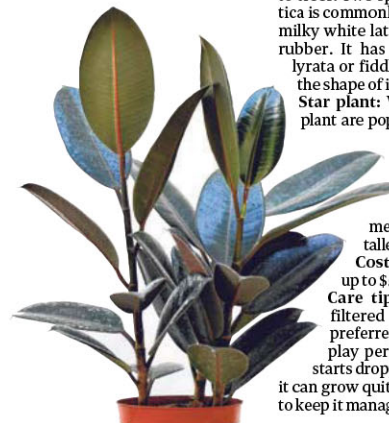
FICUS

What: Ficus is a diverse group of plants with different growth habits, ranging from climbers to shrubs to trees. Two species are grown locally. *Ficus elastica* is commonly called the rubber tree as it yields a milky white latex which was once used to make rubber. It has leathery, oval leaves. *Ficus lyrata* or fiddle leaf fig is so named due to the shape of its leaves.

Star plant: Various cultivars of the rubber plant are popular. The Black Burgundy has almost-black leaves, while variegated versions include Ruby and Tineke. Ruby has bright red-tinged new leaves. Plants look good as single specimens in small pots or as a clump of several taller plants displayed in larger containers.

Cost: Prices start at around \$13 and can go up to \$50, depending on the size.

Care tips: Grow the plant under direct or filtered sunlight. Moist, well-drained soil is preferred. The plant can tolerate only short display periods in deep shade indoors before it starts dropping its leaves. Under ideal conditions, it can grow quite fast and large, and requires pruning to keep it manageable.



The *Ficus elastica*'s cultivars include the Tineke (above), from Candy Floriculture, and Black Burgundy (left), from Rake Spade at HortPark.

• The plants featured here are available at local nurseries such as Far East Flora and Candy Floriculture in Thomson Road, Rake Spade in HortPark and Sing See Soon Flora & Landscape in Simei.

EXOTIC FRUIT PLANTS

What: Millennials who are interested in growing edible plants go for exotic fruit plants. Citruses such as lemons, limes, finger limes and yuzu; common fig, blackberries, raspberries and olives are highly sought after. Grafted plants are preferred as they can be grown in a pot and produce fruit. Potted fruit trees are easy to move around for display.

Star plant: Variegated guava is a reliable, tropical fruit tree that thrives in Singapore. Its attractive leaves with a cream margin are borne on branches with flak-

ing bark that make the plant highly ornamental. The plant produces fruit with variegated skin and a sweet, pink interior.

Cost: \$25 to about \$100, depending on the size.

Care tips: Fruit trees, like the variegated guava, prefer direct sunlight. They grow best in moist but well-draining soil. In pots, they tend to dry out quickly and need to be promptly watered. Fertilise plants when they start to flower and fruit. Wrap developing fruit to protect them from pests like fruit flies.

The *Psidium guajava*'s Variegata cultivar (above) has attractive leaves with a cream margin. ST PHOTOS: LIM YAOHUI

SANSEVIERIA

What: *Sansevieria* used to be known by the unglamorous common name, Mother-in-law's Tongue, due to the appearance of the most commonly grown species (*Sansevieria trifasciata*) – it is typified by a clump of upright, narrow and pointed leaves. New cultivars of *Sansevieria trifasciata* and *Sansevieria cylindrica* (cylindrical snake plant) have variations in leaf shape and colour.

Star plant: The whale fin snake plant, *Sansevieria masoniana*, has found favour with millennial gardeners. Its admirers are attracted to its broad leaves that resemble the fins of whales.

Cost: Each plant costs between \$35 and \$85, depending on the size and the number of leaves.

Care tips: A good choice for beginners, it is rather slow-growing and drought-tolerant, making it a low-maintenance plant. Though often touted to be shade-tolerant, this plant does better under brighter conditions to ensure its new leaves remain shapely and are not floppy.

Sansevieria masoniana (variegated, left) from Candy Floriculture.



PRAYER PLANTS

What: These have broad leaves that are arranged in a rosette. Each leaf is usually beautifully coloured and patterned. The plant is named as such due to its curious habit of folding its leaves upwards, like hands put together during praying, when it is dark. Ornamental prayer plants come from genera such as *Goeppertia*, *Maranta*, *Stromanthe* and *Ctenanthe*.

Star plant: Prayer plant cultivars with splashes of pink in their leaves are the most popular as this colour is not common in the plant world. The *Goeppertia* cultivar named Rosy features oval leaves with green borders and bright pink centres.

Cost: \$18 to \$25 depending on the size.

Care tips: Prayer plants are not particularly easy to grow indoors. They thrive in a humid environment and the low humidity in an apartment will lead to burnt leaves. They are sensitive to the fluoride in tap water and excessive use of fertiliser, which result in burnt brown leaf edges. Mist the plant regularly to remove dust and pests and to increase ambient humidity.



The *Goeppertia* cultivar named Rosy (above) features oval leaves with green borders and bright pink centres.

BEGONIA

What: Begonias constitute a large group of very diverse plants with varying growth habits. Depending on the species, begonias can be grown for flowers or foliage.

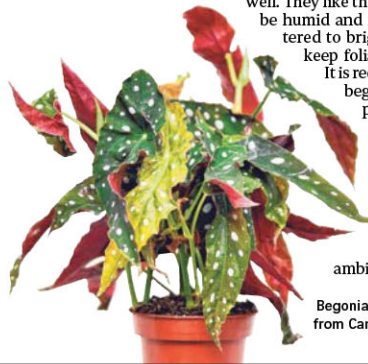
Star plant: *Begonia maculata*, also known as the Polka Dot Plant, has silver spotted leaves with red undersides. Such attributes make it a striking plant. It is a type of cane begonia which produces distinct, upright stems.

Cost: Polka Dot Plants about 20cm tall go for \$28 to \$40, while those 8 to 12cm tall cost around \$10.

Care tips: Begonias can be tricky to grow well. They like their growing space to be humid and not windy, with filtered to bright indirect light to keep foliage colours vibrant.

It is recommended to plant begonia in an aerated potting mix that dries a little between each watering to reduce the incidence of disease. Mist the plant regularly to remove dust and pests and to increase ambient humidity.

Begonia maculata (left) from Candy Floriculture.



Stephania kaweesakii (above) from Candy Floriculture.

STEPHANIA

What: These are herbaceous climbers that grow from a woody caudex, which is a fat, stout stem or root that sits just above the soil surface. Several species are available locally and their leaves can be shaped like a heart, shield or circle.

Star plant: *Stephania kaweesakii*, known to hobbyists as "Stephania Nova", is admired for its growth form as well as attractive leaves. Its leaves are round and held via a petiole in the centre, which make them resemble those of the lotus. Newly produced leaves have reddish hues and exhibit an attractive network of veins when viewed with light in the background. Its caudex features an attractive, rough surface.

Cost: Plants of a standard size of 14 to 18cm cost \$75 to \$80.

Care tips: *Stephania* is best grown in a bright location and in a moist but well-drained growing mix. The potting mix should be allowed to dry out slightly before watering again. Do not overwater or keep the potting mix wet for extended periods as this may cause the caudex to rot away. Some gardeners prune plants regularly to keep them compact.

AROIDS

What: Aroids belong to the Arum family (Araceae). Most people would be familiar with the money plant, dumbcane, flamingo flower and peace lily. Popular genera include *Monstera*, foliage *Anthurium*, *Caladium*, *Syngonium*, *Philodendron*, *Alocasia* and *Zamioculcas*.

Star plant: *Monstera deliciosa*, also known as the Swiss cheese plant, is admired for its attractive heart-shaped leaves. They are punctuated with fenestrations, or holes in the leaves. Variegated versions of this plant, such as the Thai Constellation and *Albo-Variegata*, are in great demand, but are much more costly than the regular green plant.

Cost: Prices start at around \$15. Some nurseries offer large variegated versions which can cost four figures.

Care tips: This plant is tolerant of low-light conditions, but does better under filtered sunshine. It grows as a vine and should be trained on a moss pole. The growing media should be moist and aerated. Mist the plant regularly to remove dust and pests and to increase ambient humidity.

The *Albo-Variegata* cultivar (below) of the *Monstera deliciosa* from Candy Floriculture.

