

Christmas House Plants

by Carol Barany

On a frigid morning in early December, it didn't take long for bundled up gardenistas to cover the well-worn worktables in the Master Gardener South 18th Avenue greenhouses with armloads of fragrant evergreens, dried seedpods, blood-red stems of osier dogwood, and curly grapevines.

We gathered to share a cozy morning with good friends, and make a fresh Christmas centerpiece to take home.

Some were old hands at this craft, and got to work immediately. For novices, a few vague directions were all they needed to get started. Before long, the centerpieces started looking a lot like their makers. Some were very organic and natural-looking, while others were bedecked with the bling of glittery glass ornaments and metallic ribbons.

Just before it was time to start cleaning up, one Master Gardener joyfully hoisted up her arrangement for all to admire and asked, "Who wouldn't love getting one of these for Christmas?"

We couldn't think of a single person.

For those of us who spend most of our days dreaming about gardening, it is hard to imagine why anyone wouldn't be thrilled to find a fresh botanical under their tree.

It's a fact that our sense of well-being suffers when we lose contact with nature. Ask any gardener in January what they crave, and it's the simple pleasure of puttering around plants. There's a wealth of evidence to show that environments that include indoor plants makes us happier and more relaxed.

One of the nicest and most long-lasting Christmas gifts is a plant. It's a good idea to keep things simple unless you're buying for someone you know is already a collector with a green thumb. The best plants to give are beautiful yet easy to care for.



I introduced my son William to tillandsias several Christmases ago. Commonly known as air plants because they don't need soil to grow, they use their root systems to attach themselves to trees or rocks. Tillandsias absorb moisture and nutrients through small scales on their leaves. While they look exotic, these are tough plants, adaptable and tolerant of a wide range of environmental conditions and minimal care. A regular misting is all they need to keep them happy.

After looking at how plants could help clear air pollutants in their spacecrafts, NASA came up with a list of house plants that could survive in outer space. They happen to be some of the easiest to grow, and not only are they beautiful, but they are hard to kill. If they can survive in outer space, think of how happy they'll be under the Christmas tree. Here's NASA's list:

(*Aglaonema modestum*) Chinese evergreen, Aloe vera, (*Chamaedorea seifritzii*) bamboo or reed palm, (*Chlorophytum comosum*) spider plant, (*Dracaena deremensis*) 'Janet Craig' dracaena, (*Dracaena fragrans* 'Massangeana') mass cane, (*Dracaena marginata*) red-edged dracaena, (*Epipremnum aureum*) golden pothos, (*Ficus benjamina*) weeping fig, (*Hedera helix*) English ivy, (*Philodendron domesticum*) elephant ear philodendron, (*Philodendron scandens oxycardium*) heartleaf philodendron, (*Philodendron selloum*) lacy tree philodendron, (*Sansevieria laurentii*) snake plant, and (*Spathiphyllum* 'Mauna Loa') peace lily.

If you prefer something seasonal, chose a traditional Christmas plant.

Last Sunday, I was shopping for a new ice scraper at my local hardware store. I was almost out the door when I saw them, stacked on an end-cap and calling to me like a best friend I hadn't seen in a while. I opened my arms and made room in my cart for some boxed amaryllis bulbs. Of all the flowering bulbs, amaryllis is the easiest to bring to bloom. This time of year, pre-conditioned bulbs are widely sold in kits with everything you need, and even children are almost guaranteed spectacular results.

Perfectly named, 'amaryllis' comes from the Greek 'amarysso', which means to sparkle, twinkle, or shine. Who doesn't need some of that these days?

Paperwhites, a tender member of the daffodil family, are grown for their sublime fragrance and make sweet holiday gifts. During the dreary winter months they bear multiple stems with up to 10 or 12 white flowers. Look for them in kits next to the amaryllis boxes.

Everyone needs a little greenery in their life, and you won't have to look long to find the perfect gift. Production and sales of plants exploded during the pandemic when we were spending so much time at home. Grocery stores, Big Box garden departments, and even hardware stores offer selections.

What's more, Yakima can boast of having four locally owned plant stores providing exceptional advice and customer service. Each of these shops is a plant lover's dream.

- Cascade Garden Shop, Valley Mall, Union Gap
- Roots Nursery and Landscape, 6710 Tieton Drive
- The Planted Home, 3512 Tieton Drive
- Verdant Yakima, 4001 Summitview