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chenille plant



Photo courtesy of The John Henry Company

Acalypha hispida—Chenille plant, Red-hot cattail

in-store and consumer care

LIGHT Bright, indirect light is best for plants displayed indoors. Full sun is tolerated outdoors.

WATER Keep the soil moist at all times. Avoid standing water, irregular watering and overhead watering.

TEMPERATURE Chenille plants should be displayed in warm areas. Daytime temperatures of 65 F to 80 F and a minimum nighttime temperature of 60 F are best. Do not refrigerate the plants; sudden drops in temperature may result in wilt and blossom drop.

HUMIDITY Moist air is essential for success with chenille plants. Mist the leaves frequently, and surround the pots with damp peat, or stand them on pebble trays. Dry air will cause leaf drop and allow red spider mites to flourish.

FERTILIZER Feed the plants every three weeks during the growing season with a bloom fertilizer.

SOIL The plants do best in fertile, moist, well-drained soils.

GROOMING Cut chenille plants back when they have finished flowering to remove straggly branches and faded flowers and to keep the plants compact and neat. Older,

BOTANICAL NAME

Acalypha hispida
(a-cuh-LEAF-ah his-PEE-dah)

COMMON NAMES

Chenille plant, Red-hot cattail

DESCRIPTION

Chenille plants are erect, sparsely branched shrubs that can grow 6 to 12 feet high with a spread of 3 to 6 feet. Potted plants are kept considerably smaller. These plants have evergreen leaves and feathery flowers that are clustered in velvety, pendulous, tassel-like spikes that can be 8 to 20 inches long and up to an inch in diameter. They

are dense and fluffy, like a cat's tail, and they appear intermittently throughout the year.

COLORS

Chenille plants' flowers are red, purple and white.

DECORATIVE LIFE

Each bloom cycle will last for several weeks. With proper care and favorable conditions, the plants may bloom several times a year. Chenille plants can survive for years, depending on the environment.

AVAILABILITY

Chenille plants are available year-round, usually from local markets and growers.



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woody plants can be cut back halfway to encourage new growth.

REPOTTING The plants should be repotted every spring.

TOXICITY Ingestion of the plants can cause nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Contact with the leaves' and stems' milky sap can result in acute dermatitis.

challenges

PESTS Watch for red spider mites, scales and mealybugs on indoor plants. Control them with insecticidal soap.

ETHYLENE SENSITIVITY Chenille plants show no sensitivity to ethylene gas.

fun facts

WHAT'S IN A NAME The name "*Acalypha*" comes from the Greek word for "nettle."

FAMILY These plants are members of the *Euphorbiaceae*, or spurge, family, a large family of flowering plants with 240 genera and more than 6,000 species. Relatives include *Codiaeum* (croton) and *Euphorbia pulcherrima* (poinsettia). Commercial products from the *Euphorbiaceae* family include rubber (*Hevea*), tung oil (*Aleurites*), castor oil (*Ricinus*), and cassava and tapioca (*Manihot*).

HOME SWEET HOME Chenille plants are native to Malaysia. **sfr**



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Some information provided by:

Floridata, www.floridata.com

North Carolina Cooperative Extension

www.ces.ncsu.edu

Missouri Botanical Garden, www.mobot.org

The New House Plant Expert, by Dr. D.G. Hessayon

Reach "Blooming Plant of the Month" writer Steven W. Brown, AIFD, at sbfloral@aol.com or (415) 239-3140.