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cast-iron plant



Photos courtesy of The John Henry Company

Aspidistra elatior
Cast-iron plant, Iron plant, Barroom plant

BOTANICAL NAME

Aspidistra elatior (as-pi-DIS-tra e-LAY-tee-or)

COMMON NAMES

Cast-iron plant, Iron plant, Barroom plant

DESCRIPTION

The common names for these plants, with their signature waxy, elongated, dark green leaves, underscore their hardiness and easy-care nature. Although the genus includes a number of species, it is *Aspidistra elatior*

that is known as the popular indoor foliage plant. The broad sword-shaped leaves can grow up to 24 inches long and 4 inches wide. The 'Variegata' variety features vertical stripes of white or cream.

DECORATIVE LIFE

Indoors, with proper care, the plants can last for years.

AVAILABILITY

Cast-iron plants are available year-round.

in-store and consumer care

LIGHT Cast-iron plants can tolerate low light levels although more light will result in a fuller plant. The 'Variegata' variety requires brighter light to maintain its striping. Avoid direct sunlight, which can scorch the leaves.

WATER Water sparingly, and don't allow the plants to sit in standing water. Cast-iron plants can survive some underwatering if the temperature is not too high, but they suffer with overwatering.

TEMPERATURE Average indoor temperatures around 70 F are ideal. Do not keep the plants at temperatures below 55 F. In mild climates, the plants can be moved outdoors in the summer.

HUMIDITY Dry air won't harm this plant. Wash the leaves occasionally.

FERTILIZER Feed with a diluted fertilizer once a month.

PROPAGATION Cast-iron plants can be propagated by division.

challenges

PESTS Watch for such insects as scale or spider mites. These can be treated by swabbing the leaves with a dilute soap or rubbing-alcohol solution and removing badly infested leaves if needed.

LEAF PROBLEMS Yellow leaves may indicate

overwatering. Old outer leaves will be shed occasionally, but yellowing of other leaves points to excessive watering. Slitlike holes between the leaves' veins are a sign that too much fertilizer is being used. To remedy, flush out the excess by drenching the pot and letting it drain, then skip a fertilizer treatment and start up with a more diluted fertilizer solution in the future.



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fun facts

WHAT'S IN A NAME The genus name "*Aspidistra*" is Greek for "small round shield" and refers to the shape of the flower's stigma. The species name "*elatior*" means "taller," in reference to the plant's lengthy leaves. The "iron" in the common names suggests *A. elatior's* hardiness, and the label "barroom plant" comes from Victorian times and the plant's ability to withstand the dark and smoky air of taverns.

FAMILY Cast-iron plants are members of the *Liliaceae* (lily) family. Common relatives include *Asparagus* ferns, lilies-of-the-valley (*Convallaria*), daylilies (*Heemerocallis*) and hyacinths (*Hyacinthus*).

HOME SWEET HOME Cast-iron plants are native to China and Japan.

RARE FLOWERS In the wild, *Aspidistras* produce low-growing, bell-shaped flowers in colors from cream to dark purple. These grow at the soil level and are rarely seen in the houseplants. **sfr**

Some information provided by:
Botanica, by R.G. Turner Jr. and Ernie Wasson
Chain of Life Network®, www.chainoflifenetw.org
The Complete Houseplant Survival Manual
by Barbara Pleasant
The Houseplant Encyclopedia
by Ingrid Jantra and Ursula Kruger
The House Plant Expert, by Dr. D.G. Hessayon

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