

A Northeast Home Horticulture Fact Sheet

# PHILODENDRON



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Philodendrons continue to be popular foliage plants. They are used as house plants or may be part of an interior landscape planting in an office, a lobby in a building, or in a shopping mall. The plants do well as long as they are kept warm — 65° minimum — moderately moist, and out of direct sunlight.

Members of the Arum family, philodendrons are native to the West Indies and the tropical jungles of Central and South America. Most are vines and the leaves vary from three inches to three feet in length, depending on the species. Some of the species are self-heading and require no support.

### **Potting Mix**

Philodendrons will grow in 100% sphagnum peat moss. Soil-less mixtures (peat-vermiculite) or (peat-perlite) are also satisfactory. Soil mixtures such as a 1-1-1 or a 2-1-1 (soil — sphagnum peat moss — perlite or vermiculite) can be used.

### **Propagation**

Philodendrons can be propagated by tip and leaf bud cuttings. Air layering is used to reduce the overall height of “leggy” plants. Some commercial growers use seed for propagation of select varieties.

### **Fertilization**

Fertilizers are available as powders, tablets, liquids, or pellets. All work equally well, if manufacturer’s directions are followed. Apply fertilizer only to moist soil to prevent injury to the roots. It is safer to fertilize lighter and oftener than to apply one strong dose.

Plants growing in low light conditions require less fertilizer than actively growing plants. Some plants can live for a long period of time without supplemental fertilization.

A regular feeding program with a nitrogen fertilizer will increase the leaf size and makes a larger plant. Philodendrons can be considered heavy feeders.

### **Watering**

Keep the soil moist. Never allow the potting mix to dry out. One of the essential factors in keeping philodendrons growing evenly with large uniform leaves is ample water.

An occasional spraying or misting of the foliage is beneficial, especially if they are growing in areas of low humidity.

Make sure that all excess water drains. Overwatering can cause root injury, which in turn may cause leaves to turn yellow and eventually fall off.

### **Light**

Grow in indirect sunlight. There are many types of philodendron that maintain themselves in low light intensity. Artificial

light — a mixture of fluorescent and incandescent light — gives best results if natural light is not present. Based on a daily illumination of 16 hours, some philodendrons can be maintained for at least 12 months receiving 25 to 50 foot candles.

Full sunlight causes a yellowish color in the leaves or a sunburn spot.

## Problems

**Small leaves** — Plants need to be fertilized, soil not moist enough, potting mixture is too hard and not thoroughly soaked, insufficient light, or soil is constantly too moist.

**Leaves turn brown** — Soluble salts will cause tip burn or edges of the leaves to turn brown. Salts may be flushed out by letting water run slowly through the pot for one hour. Browning of tip margins also may result from drafts, over-watering, poor drainage, lack of water, or lack of fertilizer.

**Yellow leaves (excessive) and leaf drop** — Plant is over watered. Make sure the pot has drainage and the plant is not sitting in water. Too much or too little light and lack of fertilizer may be contributing factors.

**Gradual slowing of growth** — Smaller leaves on plant often indicates a pot bound condition. Repot the plant. This condition may result from insufficient water, fertilizer, or light or from poor aeration of roots.

**Weak or yellowish color on leaves** — If the plant appears healthy, the problem may be too much light. Sunlight will also cause this problem plus a scald on the leaves.

**Small leaves and/or long leggy vines** — Not enough light.

**Leaves don't split** — *Philodendron pertusum* (*Monstera deliciosa*) needs more light than other philodendrons or the leaves will not "split." Leaves still in a juvenile stage generally are entire. Leaves on older plants sometimes return to the entire form from the "split or cut" form when growing conditions are unfavorable or when the plant grows beyond its support.

**Air Roots** — Some philodendrons have many air roots. If objectionable, they can be removed.

**Dust on leaves** — A gentle spray of clear water helps wash the dust off of the leaves. Soapy water can be used, if necessary. Keep soapy water off the soil. Special foliage waxes and polishes can be used to give a shine to the foliage. They are not necessary unless you want very shiny leaves.

**Plants growing beyond support pole** — Older plants will eventually grow beyond the end of the supporting trellis or pole. If this happens, cut back the stem to force new branches to develop. The stem must be fastened to the support. Give the plant more light and decrease the water until new growth starts. The tops of the plants can also be air layered, prior to reshaping the plant.

## Some Popular Species

### Vine types

*Philodendron scandens oxycardium* (cordatum) — the most widely grown philodendron. Has heart shaped leaves. Often grown in water or moss. Common name — Heartleaf Philodendron.

*P. scandens micans* — Silky bronze, heart shaped leaves that are reddish on the underside. Very susceptible to cold. Leaves three inches long. Common name — Velvet-leaf Philodendron.

### Long-leaved types that require support on bark or totem poles.

*P. pertusum* (Correctly known as *Monstera deliciosa*) — Juvenile form has perforated leaves that are irregularly shaped. Adult form has broad thick leaves with many perforations. Common name — Swiss Cheese plant.

*P. domesticum*, formerly called *P. hastatum* — Arrow shaped, glossy leaves. Mature leaves may be 22 inches long by 9 inches wide. One of the best plants for the home with poor growing conditions. Common name — Spadeleaf Philodendron.

*P. radiatum*, formerly called *P. dubium* — Deeply lobed leaves. Older plants tend to be straggly. Has many air roots.

*P. bipennifolium*, formerly called *P. panduriforme* — Foliage resembles a violin. Leaves up to 20 inches long by 8 inches wide. An excellent house plant. Maintains leaves for an exceptionally long time. Good climber. Common name — Fiddle leaf.

*P. 'Mandaianum'* — Glossy, reddish-brown leaves resemble *P. domesticum*.

### Large-leaved types

*P. melanochrysum*, also known as *P. andreaeanum* — Long, dark, iridescent leaves. Sensitive to cold and dry atmosphere. Common name — Black Gold Philodendron

*P. angustisectum*, formerly known as *P. elegans* — Fern like leaves, up to 20 inches long by 16 inches wide. Few air roots.

**Self-heading types** — require no support (generally propagated by seed).

*P. Wendlanii* — Long, narrow, glossy dark green leaves that grow in a rosette. Plant makes an excellent specimen plant, as it is symmetrical from all sides. Can withstand extremes of temperatures and humidity.

*P. selloum* — Large, twice lobed, glossy leaves up to 40 inches long. Excellent plant for unfavorable conditions and grows to tremendous size. Too large for the average home. This species has four distinct leaf stages from seedlings to adult. It may be kept in any stage for long periods of time by keeping it potbound. This species is resistant to cold and can stand 32°F.

*P. squamiferum* — Leaves resemble anchors. Excellent in dry rooms. Common name — Anchor philodendron.

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