

Horticulture

Indoor Trees

The houseplant is usually a small, well-kept foliage or flowering plant sitting on the windowsill. But many of our common houseplants are full-scale trees in their native habitat.

If space is available, large specimens of these plants can be used as indoor trees. Specialty plant stores often have access to large plants that can be used as effective room accents. Or you might consider growing your own.

The date palm can grow up to 100 feet outdoors, but a five-foot specimen is ideal for indoors. Plants set on a pedestal have a definite tree effect. For optimum growth, place them near any sunny east, south or west window, or add supplemental light. Room temperatures between 62 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit and moderate humidity are ideal. When old fronds turn yellow, remove them at the trunk with a sharp pruning tool to maintain an attractive stem. There are several types of Ficus that can provide a wide variety of large specimen plants that quickly grow into tree form. The fiddle leaf fig produces leathery, deep green leaves about 15 inches long, with crinkled margins on stout stems. The common rubber tree produces slightly smaller, 6 to 11-inch leaves that are bright olive-green with a touch of red along their straight margin. Well branched specimens of either plant form trees



with little effort. Both the fiddle leaf fig and rubber plant respond well to bright sunny locations, and often drop foliage if light levels drop. Supplemental artificial light will help maintain foliage quality, as will uniform soil moisture. As with the palms, temperatures of 62 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit and moderate humidity are helpful.

The weeping fig, another Ficus, probably has the greatest potential for becoming a satisfactory indoor tree. As the plant matures it branches freely and develops a spreading, tree-like form similar to outdoor landscape trees.

Rapid changes in a weeping fig's environment often causes severe leaf drop. Some leaf drop is normal after the plant is brought home. The severity of the drop can be reduced by making certain the plant receives plenty of bright daytime light and adequate water. Rapid changes also may trigger leaf drop after the plant is established, so it is important to be consistent in your treatment of the plant. Washing foliage regularly with a damp cloth will maintain good plant health.

Citrus plants (orange, lemon,

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Perennials with Colorful Foliage

Most perennials are grown for their attractive flowers. They bloom for a few days or weeks, but are green, unassuming plants during the remainder of the growing season. There are, however, some perennials that have colorful foliage. These perennials add color to the garden from spring to fall. The following is a partial list of perennials that have attractive foliage.

Hostas are a favorite foliage perennial. There are hundreds of hosta varieties. The varieties differ in leaf color, leaf shape, plant size and flower color. The foliage may be green, blue, gold, or variegated. The leaves may be long and narrow, nearly round, or heart-shaped. Hosta varieties vary in height from 2 inches to 4 feet. Flowers may be white, blue, or purple. Some varieties have fragrant flowers.

Lungworts or pulmonarias are clump-forming perennials that possess distinctive white or silver spots on their foliage. Lungworts do best in partial to heavy shade.



Sedums are fleshy-leaved perennials that are grown chiefly for their late summer bloom. However, several varieties have colorful foliage. Sedums are easy to grow, tolerate dry conditions, and have few pests. They perform best in full sun and well-drained soils.

A perennial with burgundy foliage is *Penstemon digitalis* 'Husker Red.' 'Husker Red' grows 2 1/2 to 3 feet tall. It blooms in early summer. The flowers are white with a pink tinge. The foliage is burgundy or maroon-red. It does best in well-drained soils and full sun. As you might guess, 'Husker Red'

was introduced by the University of Nebraska. It was selected as the 1996 Perennial Plant of the Year by the Perennial Plant Association.

Coral bells have been grown for many years for their showy flowers. In recent years, their popularity has soared due to the introduction of several new varieties with attractive foliage. One of the most popular varieties is *Heuchera micrantha* 'Palace Purple.' In fact, it was selected as the 1991 Perennial Plant of the Year. 'Palace Purple' has maple-shaped leaves that are greenish-purple to dark purple. Plants are 15 to 18 inches tall with a similar spread. White flowers are produced in summer. Coral bells perform best in well-drained soils and partial shade to full sun.

Other perennials with colorful foliage include snow-on-the-mountain, ajuga, lamb's-ears, sage, houttuynia and artemisia.

Consider planting perennials with colorful foliage in your garden this year. (MJF)

Harvesting Guide for Fruits and Vegetables

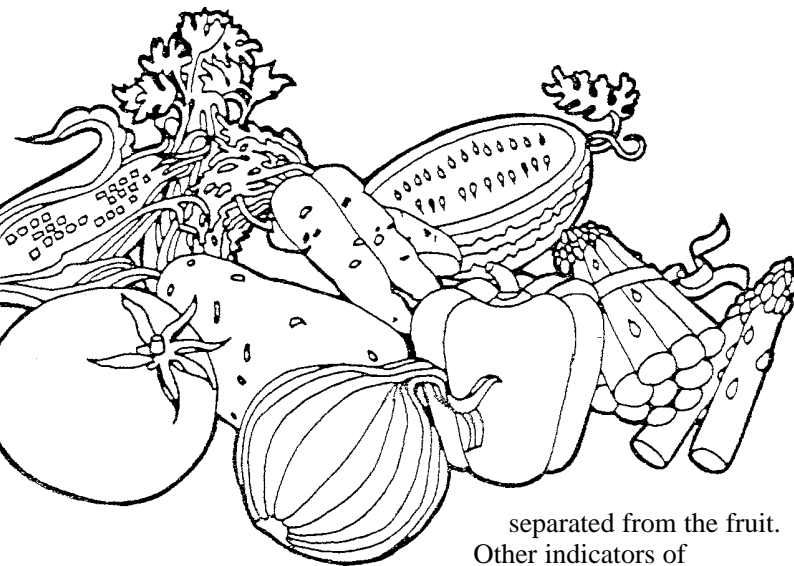
While some fruits and vegetables show unmistakable signs, the proper time to harvest many crops require a little more knowledge and experience. Guidelines for harvesting various fruits and vegetables are listed below.

PEACH-Ground color is the best guide for maturity. Harvest when ground color or the color of the fruit's skin changes from green to yellow. Disregard the areas that have turned red, because it is not a reliable index of maturity.

PEAR-Harvest when the ground color changes from dark green to a yellowish green and before the fruit is tree ripe. An additional guide may be when the fruit separates from the twig with an upward twist of the fruit and when the lenticels (spots on fruit surface), which are green on immature fruit, becomes brown.

RASPBERRY-Harvest when the fruit is full color and separates easily from the center.

TOMATO-For peak quality,



harvest 4 to 6 days after fruits are fully colored. They will lose firmness if overripe.

EGGPLANT-Harvest when the fruit is firm and a glossy purple to black in color and 3 to 5 inches in diameter.

MUSKMELON-The fruit of muskmelon or cantaloupe are mature when the stem slips easily from the melon with slight pressure. The melon is not ripe if the stem has to be forcibly

separated from the fruit.

Other indicators of maturity are based on touch, appearance and aroma. The flower end of the melon, the end opposite the stem, should be slightly soft. The skin between the netting will turn from green to yellow. A ripe melon will produce a strong musky aroma.

WATERMELON-Harvest when the melon is full sized and the underside of the melons turns from a greenish white to a

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Horticulture information center

NUFACTS

24 hours a day, 7 days a week
1-800-832-5441; or
441-7188 in the Lincoln area



To listen to a NUFACTS information center message, call the number above on a touch-tone phone, then enter a three-digit number listed below. Call 441-7180 to receive a brochure with all the NUFACTS message topics. (MJF)

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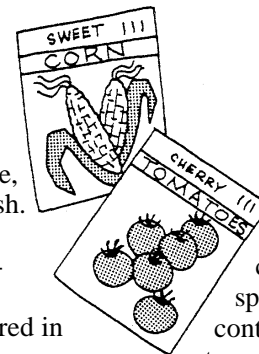
Storing Extra Seeds

Seeds can survive several years when given the proper environment. Although optimum storage life varies among species, most seeds will survive at least two-years, with some lasting for centuries. Whether they are leftovers from the seed you purchased, or seeds you have gathered from your own plants, with a little care and thought, it is a simple task to save seeds for use in next year's garden. Unused seeds that keep for at least five years are broc-

coli, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumber, kohlrabi, lettuce, pumpkin, radish and squash.

The most important storage factor is low moisture content. Most seeds readily absorb water if stored in a damp environment. In a proper planting environment, this would lead to germination and growth. In storage this leads to molding and rot. Store seeds at a relative humidity of less than 65 percent.

Seed life can be further extended by placing seeds in a



sealed container. This reduces the oxygen content and creates a controlled atmosphere. The best containers for seed storage are zip-lock plastic bags or glass jars with tight fitting lids. To avoid identification problems, leave seeds in their original packets or envelopes. Containers may be kept in a refrigerator or in any cool, dark, dry place. (MJF)