

Tropical House Garden – Plant Descriptions - South Bay Botanic Garden

1. **PLATYCERIUM bifurcatum** Staghorn ferns (Polypodiaceae family): Staghorns are tropical plants native to the Philippines, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Australia, Madagascar, Africa and America. In their native habitat they thrive as epiphytes, generally found growing on tree trunks, branches, or rocks. Tropical rains provide moisture and wash nutrients into the root area. *Platycerium bifurcatum* is most common species in cultivation and also the easiest to grow. Produces large numbers of "pups," eventually forming a very large plant. Dark green color. Hardy to temperatures of 25-30°F for short periods. Many varieties are available.
2. **MONSTERA deliciosa** Split-leaf Philodendron (Araceae family): Tropical American natives related to philodendrons and resembling them in the glossiness and texture of their foliage. Mature leaves are heavy, leathery, dark green, and deeply cut and perforated. Need rich soil. Can be grown outdoors only in the warmest climates. Indoors, direct sun in winter and bright reflected light the rest of the year are ideal.
3. **RHAPIS excelsa** Lady Palm (Arecaceae family): Rare, slow-growing, 'and extremely versatile. The thin trunks of this delightful little fan palm can reach 10' in height to form sizable clusters of foliage. These trunks are covered with interesting leaf scar patterns and are wrapped with mats of brown fiber. Shiny green leaves are deeply divided into 1" strap-like segments and are held erect on 12" to 18" stems. Bright, indirect light. Too much sun will cause the leaves to turn yellow-green.
4. **BROMELIADS** (Bromeliaceae family): Main Types of Bromeliads -There are more than 2,000 species of bromeliads, many of which originated in the Andean highlands of South America. Most bromeliads grow in circular clusters that radiate from the center. Their foliage, from irregular to symmetrical, is banded or variegated, from rail thin to extremely broad. Bromeliads produce colorful flowers as small as a quarter of an inch wide to as large as 12 inches. Some grow in the air; others grow in soil. BROMELIADS that grow in soil: Terrestrial bromeliads require soil. They need bright light throughout the year.
5. **ASPIDISTRA elatior** Cast-Iron Plant (Ruscaceae family): This sturdy, long-lived evergreen foliage plant from China is best known as a houseplant, but it also makes striking accent clumps outdoors. Spreads slowly by rhizomes. Tough arching, glossy, dark green leaf blades with distinct parallel veins are 1 -2 ½ ft. long, 3-4 in wide, 6-8 in. long leafstalk. This plant has a cast-iron constitution, thriving in conditions unacceptable to most plants. Extremely tolerant and require minimal care. Will grow in dark shaded areas as well as partial or full shade, bright to dim light. Moderate to regular watering.
6. **CORDYLINAE australis** 'Red Star' (Dracaenaceae Agaveaceae family): Woody plants with sword like leaves related to yuccas and agaves but usually ranked with palms in nurseries and landscapes. Good next to swimming pools, with boulders and gravel for desert look, near seashore. In youth forms a fountain of narrow (2-5 in. wide), 3-ft. long leaves. In maturity, it becomes a tree to 20 – 50 ft. tall, 6-12 ft. wide, branching high on trunk, and rather stiff looking. Full sun.
7. **ASPLENIUM nidus** Birds Nest Fern (Aspleniaceae family): Tender fern native to many tropical regions. Showy, undivided apple green fronds to 4 ft. long, 8 in. wide, growing upright in cluster. Grow potted indoors in winter, move to shady patio in summer.
8. **BELCHNUM gibbum** Fern (polypodiaceae- Blechnaceae family): Dwarf tree fern with three foot wide crown of fronds atop slender trunk that eventually reaches three feet high. Plants dislike overhead watering when air is humid or still.
9. **TRADESCANTIA pallida** (Commelinaceae family): is native to Mexico. In tropical and semi-tropical areas, it is commonly grown outdoors as a popular, albeit weedy, ground cover. It is commonly called wandering jew and purple heart. It typically grows to 8" tall with a trailing habit, and features thick but fragile stems clad with pointed, narrow-oblong, v-shaped leaves (4-6" long) that are sheathed to the stems. Stems and leaves are violet purple. Stems will trail to 18" or more. Three-petal, pink flowers (to 1.5" diameter) bloom in small clusters. Bright indirect light, moderate water.
10. **PACHIRA aquatic** Money tree (Malvaceae family): *Pachira aquatica* is a tropical wetland tree native to Central and South America where it grows in swamps. It is known by the common names Malabar chestnut, Guiana chestnut, provision tree, and saba nut. *Pachira aquatica* can grow up to 60' in height in the wild. It has shiny green palmate leaves with lanceolate leaflets and smooth green bark. Its showy flowers have long, narrow petals that open like a banana peel to reveal hair like yellowish orange stamens. The pachira needs plenty of sunlight; avoid direct sunlight during the summer months as the leaves may get sunburned.
11. **DRACAENA** Variegated Evergreen Palm like Tree (Agavaceae family): Foliage plants most widely grown indoors or on patio. Some show graceful, fountain like form with broad, curved, ribbon like leaves, occasionally striped with chartreuse or white. Others have very stiff, sword-shaped leaves. Grow in sun or part shade; bright indirect light and moderate water.
12. **FICUS benjamina variegata** Weeping Fig (Moraceae family): From India and Malaysia. *Ficus benjamina* 'Variegata' has simple glossy, attractive, green leaves with irregular white margins. It provides good shade or specimen tree for larger gardens or parks, since it requires space for its invasive surface root system. Often used as entryway or patio tree; also good as screen, espalier, or clipped hedge. The inconspicuous flowers bloom in spring and are followed by small fruit that may be orange, pink, or red, but rarely appear on interior plants. Give a frost-free, wind-protected location in sun or shade.
13. **FICUS elastica 'Decora'** Rubber tree (Moraceae family): Evergreen shrub or tree. Native to India and Malaysia. Often seen as a small tree or shrub in shaded "tunnel" garden entrances in cooler part of ranges. It comes back quickly if killed to ground by frost. Narrow, leathery dark green leaves are 8-12 in. long. New leaves unfold from rosy pink sheaths that soon wither and drop. Partial or full shade.
14. **GARDENIA taitensis** (Rubiaceae family): Best known for their fragrant white flowers, gardenias are evergreen shrubs. Another common name is cape jasmine. Polynesian people in the pacific islands use the extremely fragrant blooms in their flower necklaces. In some pacific island traditions, wearing a flower indicates relationship status. A flower worn on the left ear means the person is taken and on the right ear means available. Grow in partial shade, so you should consider planting gardenias on the east or west side of your home. Gardenias need acid soil so add a lot of peat moss when you plant them.
15. **CHAMAEDOREA costaricana** - Bamboo Palm (Arecaceae family): *Chamaedorea* is a genus of 107 species of palms, native to subtropical and tropical regions of the Americas. They are small palms, growing to 0.3–6cm tall with slender, cane-like stems, growing in the understory in rainforests, and often spreading by means of underground runners, forming clonal colonies. The flowers are produced in inflorescences; they are dioecious, with male and female flowers on separate plants. The fruit is an orange or red drupe 0.5–2 cm diameter. Fast growth, rich soil, plenty of water, and medium to bright light.
16. **FATSIA japonica** (Araliaceae family): From Korea, Japan. Tropical looking shrub with long-stalked, big, glossy dark green, deeply lobed, fanlike leaves to 16 in. wide. Moderate growth to 5-8 ft. high and wide; sparsely branched. Provides year-round good looks for shaded entryway or patio. Partial or full shade.
17. **DURANTA erecta variegata** (Verbenaceae family): Its brightly glowing gold and green variegated foliage provides a strong contrast to other plants. This cultivar rarely blooms or sets fruit. Duras have the ability to tolerate sun or shade but bloom best in full sun. The variegated ones such as 'Gold Edge' actually look best in partial shade however. Since 'Gold Edge' is used for its foliage display, blooming is not important.
18. **CODIAEUM variegatum 'Norma'** CROTON belongs to the Euphorbiaceae family. The Norma croton is a lush, exotic plant that is simple to cultivate. Norma crotons are characterized by waxy-textured leaves. The plants come in an array of different colors, including copper, pink, maroon, orange, yellow, light gold, ivory and green. The plant's foliage comes in several different shapes. Norma crotons can be cultivated both outdoors and indoors.
19. **CODIAEUM variegatum 'Pictum'** CROTON is a genus of flowering plants that are part of the Euphorbiaceae family, which is otherwise known as the spurge family. The plants are characterized by their leathery, vibrant leaves. The leaves can appear in many different colors, including purple, orange, red, yellow, rust and pink, as there are many different varieties of Crotons. Crotons require bright to intense light, well drained, evenly moist, but not soggy. Allow to dry slightly between watering, but never allow to dry out completely.
20. **NEPHROLEPIS cordifolia** Sword Fern (Lomariopsidaceae family): Like *N. cordifolia*, this is a tropical species. It grows to 7ft. high and wide) and has broader fronds (to 6 in. wide). Roots often have small, roundish tubers. Plant spreads by thin, fuzzy runners and can be invasive. Plants require some shade; bright indirect light and regular water.
21. **SOLEIROLIA soleirolia** (Urticaceae family): has a number of common names, including Baby's tears, Angel's tears, Mind-your-own-business, Peace-in-the-home, Pollyanna vine, Mother of thousands, and the Corsican curse. It has also been called Irish moss; however, it is not a moss. It is a delicate-looking creeping herb with juicy bright green or yellow leaves and multitudes of tiny white flowers. It grows close to the ground in mats and is sometimes used in ornamental gardens alongside ferns and other moisture-loving type of plants. It prefers shade and moderate moisture. It is a common weed in many places.

22. **ZAMIA** Zamiaceae (Cycadaceae family): Cardboard Palm: From southeastern coastal Mexico. To 3 ft. high, 6 ft. wide. Slow-growing plant. Short stemmed. Fronds to 3 ft. long, have up to 12 pairs of extremely stiff, leathery, dark green leaflets to 4 ½" long, 1 ½". wide. Best in full sun, tolerates partial or full shade.
23. **PTERIS quadriaurita 'Argyraea'** – Silver Fern (Polypodiaceae family): Three-foot bluish-green fronds with a silvery band down the center; dormant in winter. An old favorite that accepts all but the hottest sun. They are dwarf, crested, and variegated forms.
24. **ADIANTUM** Maidenhair Fern (Polypodiaceae family): Most are of tropical origin; some are western natives. All form spreading clumps over time. Stems are thin, wiry, and dark. Fronds are finely cut; leaflets are mostly fan shaped, bright green, thin textured. Plants need steady moisture and soil rich in organic matter. Maidenhair ferns die back to some extent in winters. Grow in partial or full shade and with ample water.
25. **DRACAENA marginata** (Ruscaceae family): Very easy to grow, very popular. 12 ft. tall, 5-6ft. wide. Slender, erect, smooth gray stems carry chevron markings where old leaves have fallen. Leaves are deep glossy green with narrow margin of purplish red. Grow in sun or part shade; bright indirect light and moderate water.
26. **MONSTERA deliciosa** Variegated Split-leaf Philodendron (Araceae family): Tropical American natives related to philodendrons and resembling them in the glossiness and texture of their foliage. Mature leaves are heavy, leathery, dark green, and deeply cut and perforated. Need rich soil. Can be grown outdoors only in the warmest climates. Indoors, direct sun in winter and bright reflected light the rest of the year are ideal.
27. **SPATHIPHYLLUM cochlearispathum** (Araceae family): commonly known as Spath or Peace Lilies. They are evergreen herbaceous perennial plants with large leaves 12-65 cm long and 3-25 cm broad. The flowers are produced in a spadix, surrounded by a 10-30 cm long, white, yellowish, or greenish spathe. The plant does not need excessive light or water to survive. Spathiphyllum cleans indoor air of many environmental contaminants, including benzene, formaldehyde, and other pollutants. It lives best in shade and needs little sunlight to thrive. It is watered approximately once a week. The soil is best left moist but only needs watering if the soil is dry. Spathiphyllum is mildly toxic to humans and animals when ingested.
28. **BREYNIA disticha** - Snow BUSH (Euphorbiaceae family): Is a rounded shrub that is used primarily for its attractive foliage. This five to eight foot-tall, vase-shaped to rounded plant has variegated leaves with white, green and red coloration. Plants appear to differ in foliage coloration with some showing almost whitish new growth and others with a white and green variegation. The fruits are red berries that are 3/8 inch wide. Grow in moderate light.
29. **SYNGONIUM podophyllum** (Araceae family): is the most commonly cultivated species, being used as a houseplant since the late 19th century. It was originally confused with the similar-looking African genus Nephthytis, and this is still used as a common name for the plant. Other names include: Arrowhead plant, Arrowhead vine, Arrowhead Philodendron, Goosefoot and African evergreen. They require high humidity, good light, but not direct sunlight; they will tolerate low light levels.
30. **PEPEROMIAS scandens** – Cupid Peperomias: are best cultivated in light, well drained compost containing plenty of humus and do well in shallow containers. Coming from tropical rain-forest habitats, they love warm humid conditions and most need a minimum temperature of 50 - 55°F. However, the stems and foliage can be prone to rotting and Peperomias should be watered sparingly from below (especially in winter) using soft water, avoiding wetting the crown of the plant. In warm climates. Peperomias can be grown outside as ground cover or as epiphytes on tree trunks, but beware of slugs which enjoy the fleshy foliage.
31. **EPIPREMNUM pinnatum 'Aureum'** POTHOS aureus (Araceae family): Philodendron relative from the Solomon Islands. Oval, pointed, 2-4 in. long leathery dark leaves splashed or marbled with yellow. It's capable of climbing the tallest trees and is sometimes used as a ground cover at the base of trees. Grows well in shade.
32. **PEPEROMIAS acuminata** (Piperaceae family): are best cultivated in light, well drained compost containing plenty of humus and do well in shallow containers. Coming from tropical rain-forest habitats, they love warm humid conditions and most need a minimum temperature of 50 - 55°F. However, the stems and foliage can be prone to rotting and Peperomias should be watered sparingly from below (especially in winter) using soft water, avoiding wetting the crown of the plant. In warm climates. Peperomias can be grown outside as ground cover or as epiphytes on tree trunks, but beware of slugs which enjoy the fleshy foliage.
33. **SANSEVIERIA trifasciata** (Ruscaceae Agavaceae family): It is commonly called the Snake plant because of the shape of its leaves, or Mother-in-law's tongue because of their sharpness. In Africa the plant is used as a protective charm against evil or bewitchment. It is an evergreen herbaceous perennial plant forming dense stands, spreading by way of its creeping rhizome underground. Its stiff leaves grow vertically from a basal rosette. Mature leaves are dark green with light gray-green cross-banding and usually range between 70–90 cm in length and 5–6 cm in width. Tolerant of low light levels and irregular watering.
34. **NEPHROLEPIS exaltata' Bostoniensis'** Fern (Lomariopsidaceae family): Tough and easy to grow, these are the most widely used of all ferns. Grows 2-3 ft. tall and 5 ft. wide. Tufts of bright green, narrow (2-in. wide), upright fronds with closely spaced, finely toothed leaflets. Roots often have small, roundish tubers. Plant spreads by thin, fuzzy runners and can be invasive. Plants require some shade; bright indirect light and regular water.
35. **DRACAENA reflexa variegata** Song of India (Ruscaceae Dracaenaceae family): The Dracaena Song of India slowly grows into an upright bushy plant following a common oval or palm-like shape. Its lance late evergreen leaves are spirally arranged on the irregular stems and grow in tight whorls thereby looking stunning en masse. The bold yellow markings that run along the edges of the leaves differentiate Dracaena Song of India from the other dracaenas. During winter, white small clustered flowers appear along with occasional fruit production. It prefers bright, filtered light, without direct sun exposure.
36. **SANSEVIERIA parva** Kenya hyacinth (Agavaceae family): The Kenya Hyacinth is a relatively fine-textured species with narrow, reflexing leaves about 8 to 16 inches long and 0.5 to 1 inch wide. Rosettes are composed of 6 to 12 medium green leaves with dark green cross-bands. Some plants send runners terminated with small plantlets. Rosettes offset by underground stolons, up to 12 inches tall. Light shade.
37. **PHILODENDRON erubescens** (Araceae family): normally has a reddish stem with reddish petiole and cataphyll but even those can be green. Color can be important in some instances but not when there are no other characteristics to support the claim the plant is a different species. Philodendrons can be in mild climates in shady spots. Wiping the leaves off with water will remove any dust and insects.
38. **ZANTEDESCHIA aethiopica** Calla Lily (Araceae family): Other common names are Lily of the Nile, Easter lily, Arum lily) Zantedeschia aethiopica is native to southern Africa in Lesotho, South Africa, and Swaziland. The Zantedeschia are rhizomatous herbaceous perennial plants. The inflorescence is a showy white spathe shaped like a funnel with a yellow, central, finger-like spadix. It grows to (2–3 ft) tall, with large clumps of broad, arrow shaped dark green leaves up to (18 in) long. Z. aethiopica is a very strong and sturdy plant, being able to grow in many soils and habitats, multiplying by rhizome-offsets. Best in full sun or light shade.
39. **PHILODENDRON** Evergreen Vines and Shrubs (Areaceae family): Tough, fast-growing plants favored for attractive, leathery, usually glossy leaves. In good conditions, old plants may bloom; the blossoms resemble those of calla (Zantedeschia) with a boat like bra surrounding a club-shape structure. Feed lightly and frequently for good growth and color.
40. **CORDYLINE fruticosa** - TI PLANT 'Pink Sister' (Agavaceae family): Ti plants or cordylines, are extremely popular worldwide for their intense leaf colors and leaf shapes producing interest and contrasts even in deep shade. It is a woody plant growing up to 13 ft. tall, with leaves (12–24 in. long and 2.0–3.9 in.) wide at the top of a woody stem. It produces (16–24 in.) long panicles of small scented yellowish to red flowers that mature into red berries. Full sun or sun to partial shade.
41. **DRACAENA fragrans**. Corn Plant (Agavaceae family): Upright, 20' high and 5' wide, but slow growing. Heavy, ribbon-like, blue-green leaves to 3ft long, 4" wide.
42. **JUSTICIA brandegeana** (Acanthaceae family) is a genus of flowering plants in the bear's breeches family. Common names include water-willow and shrimp plant. The shrimp plant, a common ornamental shrub, thrives in the shade in tropical areas and can be propagated by stem cuttings. It does best in well-drained sandy or loamy soil, but is generally low maintenance and drought-tolerant. It is also excellent as a potted house plant in cooler climates.
43. & 46. **DRACAENA** (UNKNOWN)
44. **SYNGONIUM podophyllum** (Araceae family): is the most commonly cultivated species, being used as a houseplant since the late 19th century.. Some leaves are almost entirely white, pink or yellow. All parts of the plant are poisonous and cause severe mouth pain if eaten. They require high humidity, including misting the leaves regularly, and good light, but not direct sunlight; they will tolerate low light levels.
45. **DRACAENA deremensis**: 'Warneckii' (Ruscaceae family): Dracaena deremensis is erect, grows as an 8 to 15 feet, 3 ft. wide, 2 ft. long unbranched rosette of evergreen leaves in rich green striped white and gray. Dracaena deremensis has also been shown by the NASA Clean Air Study to help remove chemicals such as Formaldehyde as well as xylene and toluene. The plant does best in a medium or low light location.
48. **PTERIS cretica 'albo-lineata'** – Variegated Brake Fern (Polypodiaceae family): Leaves with five to seven short narrow leaflets, green with wide white central band. Does best in bright indirect sunlight coming from the North/East/West. Keep soil evenly moist at all times and use warm water.