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Horticulture News

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People really love their houseplants! Some are easier to care for than others but we are always willing to give growing them a try. One unique houseplant that has colorful strap-like leaves and is easy to care for is the dracaena (*Dracaena*). Growing naturally only in the warm climates of U.S. Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zones 10 through 12, dracaena typically grows indoors for most Americans. Although the plants grow very tall in their native environments, the same plants reach much shorter heights indoors. One such example is the corn plant dracaena (*Dracaena fragrans*), which grows up to 50 feet tall outdoors in tropical parts of Africa and from 4 to 6 feet tall indoors. Dracaena exhibits an upright form no matter the cultivar.

Types of Dracaena

While all dracaena are easy to grow, they do have different features. For instance, dragontree, also known as Red Edged Dracena (*Dracaena marginata*), which grows up to 6 feet tall indoors, resembles a small palm tree with narrow, green leaves on woody, upright stems. *Song of India* (*Dracaena reflexa* 'Variegata') has a more compact shape with whorls of variegated green leaves edged with yellow; it grows from 3 to 6 feet tall. The corn plant has broad, variegated leaves that are about 2 feet long and 3 inches wide.

Containers and Placement

Containers must promote good drainage. Choose clay pots with drainage holes that allow the soil to partially dry out in between watering, but don't allow the soil to dry out completely. Place your pot where the plant can get bright light but is out of direct sunlight. If the leaves on your plant begin to fade and grow longer, the plant may need more light.

Soil and Water

Dracaena thrive in rich soil with plenty of organic material, such as a well-draining, high peat moss commercial potting soil. Water the plant thoroughly once a week, allowing the water to run through the container completely. Do this by placing the pot in the sink to water or by having a saucer deep enough to catch the water as it runs through. Water slowly, only until you begin to see water in the saucer.

Feeding and Pruning

Like all indoor plants, dracaena thrive with only one or two feedings with a fertilizer designed specifically for houseplants. Feed the plant only during the growing season, between March

and September. Dracaena plants respond well to pruning, so if you want to reduce the height of a dragontree for example, cut off the stem and a new crown of leaves will grow back. If the leaves on your plant have turned brown from too little light or from underwatering, cut them off and new ones will grow in their place.

Problems

Pests and disease are rare problems with dracaena, but fluoride in your water may cause the plant's leaves to turn yellow or brown at the tips. Try using distilled water or rainwater to see if you can solve the problem. The same symptoms may result from low humidity, so add a layer of gravel in the bottom of the plant's saucer to create a more moist atmosphere. The water held by the pebbles will evaporate into the air directly around the plant in a slow and consistent way, thereby creating a small, mini-atmosphere of moist air around the plant.

Warning

Dracaena can be toxic to both dogs and cats if they eat the plant. Symptoms of poisoning can include vomiting, depression, weight loss, hypersalivation and dilated pupils.