

IN FASHION FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON

Houseplants make a comeback

Want some style news you can use? Turns out, old-school houseplants are hip and happening. We're talking everything from aspidistras to spider plants (or hen and chickens as many of us know them). As a growing number of people live in smaller spaces and have less time for gardening, they turn to houseplants for a connection to nature. Millennials share photos of favourite plants on social media, influencing friends and followers to join the movement.

By Anna Mouton

It's not all about Instagram though. Science has shown that houseplants improve air quality indoors. A study by NASA found that plants can remove toxins released by furniture and flooring such as formaldehyde and benzene. Other researchers have discovered that being around plants reduces stress and even boosts creativity. Caring for plants helps people to cope with depression and loneliness.

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Here at MARKtoe! we believe that sharing is caring – and what better time to show some love than Christmas? This month we bring you tips on the best houseplants for gifts as well as what to do if you are the lucky one to receive a plant. We also offer a new way to make your festive season greener: by adopting a live Christmas tree!

FOR THE PERSON WHO HAS EVERYTHING

Houseplants are great gifts because they turn any space into home. They need just enough attention to make us feel like we are nurturing something, but not so much that it becomes a burden. Think of an elderly relative who may have limited mobility – they can still enjoy caring for a plant. Or that friend who is crazy-busy at her new job and could use a little more nature in her life. Even someone who travels frequently will appreciate having a cactus greeting them on their return, rather than an empty apartment.

So, what to buy? Not every plant is suitable for every situation. We've got some suggestions to guide you to the perfect gift.

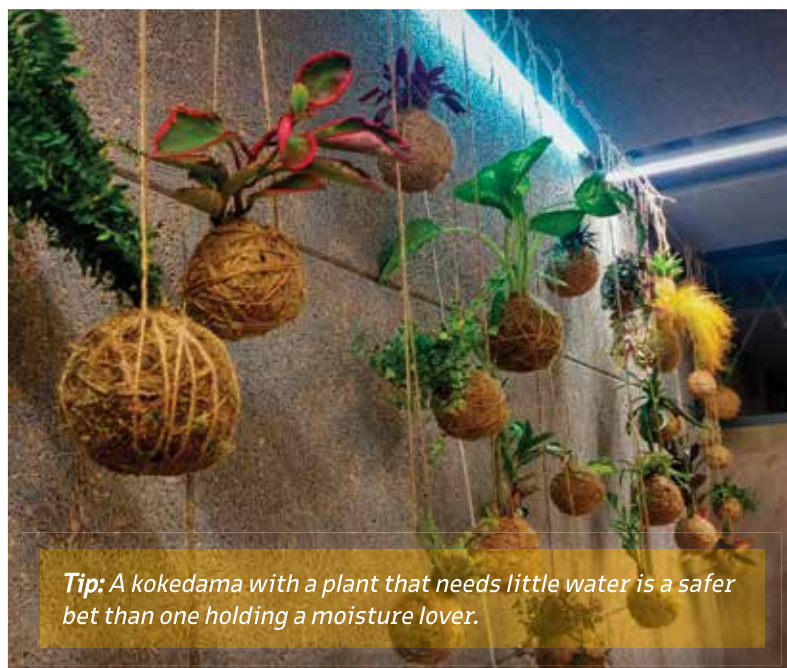


Succulents and cacti take up little space and need minimum attention. Anthuriums are stylish, colourful and flower often.

 Available at Agrimark Garden Zone nurseries.

1. For elderly or disabled persons

Anthuriums – sometimes called flamingo flowers – are fantastic. Their flowers are shaped like miniature arums and come in bright reds and pinks. They flower almost continuously throughout the year and individual flowers last a long time. Anthuriums tolerate low light and have moderate water requirements. Anthuriums are ideal for people with limited mobility because they tend to remain small, making them easy to manage.



Tip: A kokedama with a plant that needs little water is a safer bet than one holding a moisture lover.

2. For millennials, hipsters, Instagrammers or style gurus

This has to be a kokedama. No, that's not a plant species! Kokedamas are balls from which plants grow – sort of like a hanging basket, but without the basket. The growing medium and roots are wrapped in a fibrous layer of coir or moss which is designed to be hung up. Kokedamas are all the rage and will make an excellent gift for a stylish friend or relative.



Although a rosemary plant looks pretty and can be used for cooking, they grow into large shrubs.

 Available at Agrimark Garden Zone nurseries.

Better to go for perennials, as these herbs produce for a long period of time.

3. For foodies

You can't go wrong with edible plants, but choose with care! Avoid annuals that will be eaten in a single sitting, like basil. Better to go for perennials, as these produce for a long period of time. Think about the adult size of the plant – that adorable baby rosemary is destined to become a six-foot shrub. The following are good candidates for small containers: thyme, oregano and marjoram. Or try a chilli bush for the adventurous gourmet. All these plants want sun. Alternatively, mint will grow in half-shade and is wonderful for making a refreshing tea.

4. For brown-fingered friends

Some people struggle to keep plants alive. Perhaps they are forgetful or maybe they are often away from home. Luckily, there are plants that will survive nearly anything. Succulents may seem an obvious choice, but most need full sun or very bright light, which are often not available indoors. Consider aspidistras instead – they are not called cast-iron plants for nothing. They will survive low light, dry air and irregular watering. No home has to go without plants as long as these tough specimens are available.



Word of advice: Most houseplants have a label or tag that provides the name and some instructions for care. The beneficiary of your gift will appreciate this information, so don't remove it.

5. For smokers

Houseplants can improve air quality indoors by filtering out toxic chemicals. We've already mentioned NASA's research on this. So how about an air-purifying plant for a friend or relative who smokes? Dracaenas (or dragon trees) are amongst the most efficient air cleaners. They are easy-going and long living. The striking foliage of the variegated forms will make a stylish addition to any home.

Once you've decided on a plant, it's time to go shopping. Most nurseries offer a wide range of houseplants. You can also find them at some florists and supermarkets. Examine the stock critically and reject anything with bone dry soil, yellow or brown leaves, dusty foliage or pests such as scale or mealy bugs. If in doubt, move on. You want a glossy green plant with an expansive vibe. Trust us on this: plants that are healthy and happy show it by radiating contentment.



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CARING FOR YOUR CHRISTMAS PRESENT

So far, we've been on about giving plants to others. But what if you're on the receiving end? For starters, say thank you and think of how you can enjoy all the joys of having a houseplant. Hopefully your plant arrives with a name tag or some basic instructions. If not, don't panic: we've summarised the essentials of plant care for you here!

Hoekom 'n klimraam een van die BESTE GESKENKE vir jong kinders is



Die feesseisoen is om die draai en gewoonlik soek ouers na die beste geskenke vir hulle kinders. Die kleintjies het natuurlik lankal hul lysie uitgeskryf en seker gemaak Mamma en Pappa weet presies wat hulle wil hê. Maar ouers wil iets gee wat die kleintjies nie net sal besig hou en vermaak nie, maar ook goed vir hulle ontwikkeling sal wees. Dis juis die rede waarom 'n klouterraam 'n uitstekende keuse vir groeiende kinders is.

Wakker verbeelding aan – Verdedig hulle die kasteel teen indringers? Of speel hulle in die oerwoud saam met 'n trop stoute apies? Vra uit en hulle sal jou van ongelooflike avonture vertel! Klimrame gee kleingoes die kans om nuwe speletjies te speel en 'n opwindende fantasiewêreld te betree. Kinders geniet dit om hulle verbeelding te gebruik en ouers kan die geleentheid daarvoor skep.

Sit die skerm af – Deesdae kyk kinders hopeloos te veel na elektroniese skerm, al speel hulle opvoedkundige speletjies of kyk hulle net Saterdagoggende na animasieprente. Tegnologie is wonderlik, maar dis belangrik dat kinders genoeg moet beweeg en ook buite moet speel.

Moedig hulle aan om aktief te wees – As jy wil hê dat jou kinders 'n bietjie vars lug moet kry en buite moet speel, is 'n klimraam net die antwoord. Klouterraam is ontwerp om kinders aan te moedig om te klim, te kruip, te klouter en te swaai. En bowenal sal hulle dit nie eens as oefening beskou of uitputtend vind nie!




1. Dassie 2. Baboon 3. Buffalo 4. Cheetah 5. Cobra 6. Eagle

 Ses verskillende eenhede om van te kies. Beskikbaar by Agrimark-winkels.

Hulle sal nie verveeld raak nie – Videospeletjies kan gou afgesaag raak en dan neul hulle vir 'n nuwe. En as jy hulle kan kry om 'n boek te lees, soek hulle gou-gou nog een. Speelgoed breek of hulle raak verveeld daarmee. Maar klimrame keer verveeldheid en bied altyd die kans op avontuur, pret en plesier, want hulle kan nuwe speletjies uitdink soos hulle op hul eie of saam met maats speel.

Dis nie té moeilik om op te rig nie – Die meeste mense dink dis moeilik om 'n klouterraam aanmekaar te sit, maar The Pole Yard het die hele proses baie eenvoudig en moeiteloos gemaak. Intendeel, almal in die familie kan help om een van die doen-dit-self-eenhede op te rig. Al die belangrike dele word vooraf opgestel en al die nodige skroewe en toebehore word verskaf.

Dis belangrik vir groeiende kinders om genoeg oefening te kry, om tyd in die buitelug te bestee en om hulle verbeelding te gebruik. So as jy wonder wat die beste geskenk is wat jy jou kind kan gee, hoekom nie hulle eie klouterraam nie? Dis die ideale speelding om kinders gedurende die lang skoolvakansies besig te hou! 



The Pole Yard Hoofkantoor:
Lakeshorestraat 8,
Capricorn Besigheidspark, Muizenberg
T: 021 200 0425 | E: admin@poleyard.co.za
www.poleyard.co.za

Most houseplants prefer bright conditions, but will tolerate low light. Don't put them in direct sun as this usually burns their leaves. Darkness won't do either. A rule of thumb is to hold a sheet of white paper directly behind the plant. If it casts no shadow at all, chances are it's not getting enough light. And electric lights don't count unless they are specifically designed for plants.

More houseplants die from too much water than from too little.

More houseplants die from too much water than from too little. So, when should you water? Press your finger into the soil up to your first knuckle. If the soil feels dry, water. If wet, test again in a day or two. Water enough until a little runs out the drainage holes at the bottom of the pot, but remember that the pot should never stand in water. If a pot plant holder or drip tray doesn't dry within a couple of hours after watering, empty it out.

Once your plant has settled in, you can think about feeding it. Any place that sells plants, probably also sells plant food. Buy food that is formulated for houseplants and follow the instructions on the packaging. Feeding your plants once a month should be fine although more often will result in better growth. Give less food in winter when plants slow down.

After a year or two – yes, your plant will still be alive – you should re-pot it. You can re-plant it in the same pot if you don't want the plant to become larger. Simply trim the roots to make space for some fresh potting soil. Prune the top growth to balance the root volume. Alternatively, you can re-pot it in a container that is one or two inches larger in diameter than the old pot. Don't go too big as plants don't like feeling lost in a container.

These instructions apply to most common houseplants – basically, anything with fairly big, dark green leaves. If you're new to tending plants and want more certainty, you can always take your plant or a photo of it to a local nursery and ask for identification and advice.



Visit your nearest Agrimark for identification and advice on plants.

GREEN YOUR TREE

Christmas trees are as much a part of the holiday season as carols and gifts. But it's not at all clear where the notion of a decorated tree started. Christmas trees as we know them go back at least six centuries, to the days when northern Europeans began to adorn their trees with sweets. The custom gradually spread throughout Germany and then further afield thanks to its adoption by various royal houses.

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Young Queen Victoria had her own tree every Christmas. The family Christmas tree became fashionable after she married Prince Albert – picture the mundane tree as yesteryear's equivalent of Meghan Markle's handbag! Soon everyone had a Christmas tree. Traditionally these were conifers such as firs or pines.

Most natural trees are either harvested from forests or grown as a crop on special Christmas tree farms. They are cut down to sell. Artificial trees are not a modern invention: trees made of dyed green feathers were already marketed a century ago. The rise of plastic trees is an unfortunate sign of our times. Figures from the United States and Britain show that today up to two thirds of all Christmas trees are plastic. Most of these cannot be recycled.

What to do if you want a Christmas tree that's green in the complete sense? Try growing your own! Any plant in a container can be festooned with tinsel during the festive season. It's as easy as choosing a tree or shrub and potting it up. Add whatever ornaments you fancy and you're good to go.

Conifers are the archetypal Christmas tree. The good news is that many do well in containers and can be pruned and trained to whatever size and shape you desire – this is one reason why conifers are popular bonsai subjects. For a truly indigenous Christmas, why not try a yellowwood? The broad-leaved yellowwood (*Podocarpus latifolius*) is our national tree and its distribution area includes Table Mountain. Outeniqua yellowwoods (*Afrocarpus falcatus*) are known to most people as the much-loved, iconic big trees of Knysna.

Of course, you don't have to limit yourself to conifers! Try a white stinkwood (*Celtis africana*) for its graceful habit and lovely pale bark. Shrubs like the Mickey Mouse bush (*Ochna serrulata*) are another option. Or dare to be different and perch your Christmas fairy on an aloe.

Whichever one you select, you will have to plant it in a roomy container using specially formulated potting compost. Potting compost is

designed to promote healthy roots through free drainage and an open structure. Ordinary garden soil is not suitable as a growing medium for containers.



A beautiful selection of plants available at these Agrimark Garden Zone nurseries.

Garden Zone Paarl:
Corner of Oosbosch & Distillery Street
021 860 8101
Garden Zone Franschhoek:
Reservoir Street | 021 876 3057
Garden Zone Robertson:
Adderley Street | 023 626 1900
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18 Loop Street | 022 921 3535



If your container will remain outdoors for most of the year, make sure that you are able to lift or move it and that you have a drip tray for when you take it indoors. A plant that usually lives outside will be fine spending a couple of weeks in your lounge. Remember to water it should the soil become dry. Other than that, all you need do is enjoy your tree, knowing that it will serve your family for years to come.

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