

## Houseplants

by Barbara Wagner

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After a field trip with the Huron Garden Club to a local nursery last fall, I came home with four new houseplants. The four, three successfully growing in my house, illustrate some of the common needs of these plants: soil, water, and light.

Most houseplants are tropical plants require a temperature in 70 to 78 degrees. Some plants require high humidity – you can keep water in purchased humidity trays or use a tray with stones to achieve higher humidity.

The first plant I purchased was a spider plant, a beloved plant of many gardeners. It was spritely and growing well with many babies. It was also pot bound. When I placed in it the saucer, I could see roots growing out of the base of the pot. It would need to be repotted.

Repotting houseplants is healthy for the plant and is a good chore for the winter months before you start working in your garden. The plant should be put in a clean pot with drainage holes no more than 2 inches larger diameter than the original pot. Like most gardeners I have a cabinet of pots. I routinely clean the old pots and sterilize with a mixture of 10% bleach to water. So, I was ready to go.

First, I filled the bottom of the pot with new All Purpose potting soil, good for spider plants. There are special blends for African violets and succulents and cactus. You can buy the special blends or do research and blend your own from potting soil, perlite, and peat moss. Special blends often are enriched with fertilizer that can feed the plant for several months. If you are growing orchids, you will want to use Orchid Bark.

As recommended, I watered the spider plant a half hour before I replanted it. After gently removing the plant from the pot, I loosened the dense roots and

placed the plant in the new pot. Then I put soil around the edges of the pot until the pot was full. Then lightly watered. I also planted one of the babies in a tiny pot. My spider plants are thriving in my lighted plant stand.

The second plant I bought was a hoya. I have been interested in these plants since I saw one at my brother-in-law's house. He was growing it in a sunny living room window. The trick is that hoyas are succulents and I have a bad case of overwatering succulents. The plant tag said to water it only when it was dry. In this case, it is important that the water drains out the bottom of the pot and that it dry out before the next watering. So far, so good.

The third plant was a Streptocarpus Pretty Turtle. It can also be called Cape Primrose or False Africa Violet. I have a pretty good track record with African violets so I thought I could easily grow this plant. It is doing well. It likes my plant light and enjoys being watered from the bottom just like African violets.

The last two plants I bought were both velvet leaved tradescantias, common name Wandering Jew. One was light green and the other purple. They were beautiful and I could not resist them.

My mother grew tradescantia when I was young. They grow well in hanging baskets and are easy to propagate from leaf cuttings. They like bright indirect light, but overwatering can be a problem. They can be placed outside in the summer but must be brought inside during the cold Ohio months.

The problem was twofold: my house and my cats. I simply do not have a space for hanging baskets in indirect bright light in my house. If I put them up high on my plant light stand, Sheba, my cat, was sure to try to get to them for a tasty snack. I could imagine the plant stand crashing to the ground. And tradescantia are toxic to cats. Fortunately, my friend Amy had room for a couple of new plants in the office where she works. The plants are blooming well in somebody else's care.

Buying new houseplants is fun. But it is important to consider the lighting and the space requirements of the plants. And the next time I go shopping, I need to take a list of plants that are non-toxic for cats.