



# Garden Clippings



Niagara College Greenhouse Centre Success Sheet No. 80

## Cast-iron Plant

### A Short History

The cast-iron plant is native to eastern Asia, and it was brought in the 1820s to England, where it was grown as an indoor plant. Soon the cast-iron plant was found in the parlors of many Victorian homes, and it became the must-have plant for almost one hundred years. However, this hardy plant became outdated and unpopular in the early 1920s.

### Names

The botanical name for the cast-iron plant is *Aspidistra elatior*. However, the aspidistra has been given common names such as the bar-room plant, the lager-beer plant and the cast-iron plant because of its resilience in poor conditions.

Starting in the 1820s, the aspidistra was placed in bars and parlors that had poor light, smoky fireplaces, and bad ventilation. However, this hardy plant still thrived.

### A Brief Description

The aspidistra has tall, elegant, green leaves that grow straight up from the roots. The leaves can grow up to three feet tall and three inches wide. Fresh leaves grow up to three times a year, keeping the aspidistra fresh and full.

The flowers are a purplish brown with six to eight lobes, but they grow near the bottom of the plant and usually can't be seen. Unfortunately, this endearing plant is slow growing, but it's worth the wait.

### Some Good Advice

The aspidistra thrives on neglect, but it can be killed. Therefore, to have a happy and beautiful plant, several things can be done. First, plant the aspidistra in a porous medium, for good aeration, because it doesn't do well in wet conditions. Second, fertilize every three to four months if the plant is in a shady area, monthly if the plant is in a sunny area.

The aspidistra is hardy to zone 7, so it should be kept in a fairly warm area; however, it can handle cooler temperatures.

In addition, aspidistras require less than the amount of light needed for reading. Finally, repotting your aspidistra every five years will increase the life span of the plant and keep it healthy.

### Some Interesting Cultivars

The aspidistra has several interesting cultivars, some with stripes and some with spots.

The 'Asahi,' or 'Sunrise,' cultivar has a snowy blaze of white at the tip of the leaves, and it likes to have lots of light. The 'Amanogawa,' or 'Milky Way,' looks like a multitude of stars on a clear night. It has very wide leaves that arch at the tip and are covered in creamy spots. Also, the 'Akebono,' or 'Daybreak,' simply has a strong, yellow stripe down the middle.

So whether you like stripes, spots or the classic green, the cast-iron plant is far from outdated.

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