VOLUME: XVII ISSUE: 3 May 2026

A word about Minnehaha Master Gardeners: We are volunteers trained through the South Dakota State University Extension Master Gardener Program. The mission of MMG is to enhance and supplement community educational efforts of the SDSU Extension Master Gardener Program and to provide research-based education and information on horticulture and environmental stewardship. For more information on becoming a Master Gardener, visit SDSU Extension Master Gardener volunteer program

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What's inside

The Survivors: Low Light, Low Water Plants

Houseplant Series, Part 2: Turning Good Intentions into Success

Pam Conklin, Master Gardener

Some plants are built to endure.

In nature, these plants survive in tough conditions—low light, inconsistent rainfall, and periods of neglect. Indoors, they are among the most reliable and forgiving houseplants.

While they differ in appearance, they share a common strategy: conserve resources and tolerate stress.

Snake Plant (Dracaena *trifasciata*) has thick, upright leaves that store water, allowing it to go weeks without watering.
ZZ Plant (Zamioculcas *zamiifolia*) grows from underground rhizomes—structures that hold water and energy, helping it survive drought.
Cast Iron Plant (Aspidistra *elatior*) has durable, leathery leaves that tolerate low light and fluctuating conditions with ease.

In nature, these plants solve the problem of survival by holding onto what they have—water, nutrients, and energy.

Care at a Glance

- Light: Low to moderate; tolerate low light well
- Water: Infrequent; allow soil to dry between watering
- Soil: Well-draining
- Temperature: Average indoor conditions
- Humidity & Airflow: Flexible; tolerate dry air and drafts

Extension Insight

Research from Penn State Extensionhttps://extension.psu.edu/low-light-houseplants/ highlights that snake plants are

widely successful indoors because they tolerate a wide range of light levels and require minimal watering. They are often placed in low-light areas, such as north-facing windows, and can still grow steadily when conditions are well matched.

This reinforces a key idea: plants adapted to low light use resources more slowly—and therefore require less frequent care.

Common Problems

The most common issue with these plants is overwatering. Because they store water, consistently moist soil can lead to root rot. Yellowing leaves or soft stems are often signs of too much water, not too little.

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Difference Between "Short Day" and "Long Day" Onions

Carla Goetsch, Master Gardener

Photoperiod sensitivity (or sunlight hours) is what determines the type of onion.

Aspect	Short Day	Long Day
Daylight	10-12 Hours	14-16 Hours
Season	Fall in Southern Regions	Spring in the North
Bulb Trigger	Bulb starts with shorter days	Bulb starts with longer days
Harvest Time	80-90 days	100-120 Days
Types	'Texas Super Sweet', 'Creole' 'Vidalia', 'Granex'	'Walla Walla', 'Yellow Sweet Spanish'
Flavor	Sweeter, Milder	More Pungent, Robust
Storage Time	2-3 Months	6-8 Months

There is also a type of "day-neutral onion," also known as an intermediate onion, which is less dependent on hours of daylight. Maturity is about 95-110 days, so it should be planted early (early May). Varieties may include 'Candy', 'Super Star', 'Cimarron', or 'Red Stockton'.

Here in Minnehaha County, "Long Day" or "day neutral" onions are what you want to plant in the spring, since 12 to 16 hours of daylight are needed to trigger the initiation of bulbing. This is also why it is so important that onions are planted in full sun, not in an area that may catch a couple of hours of shade.

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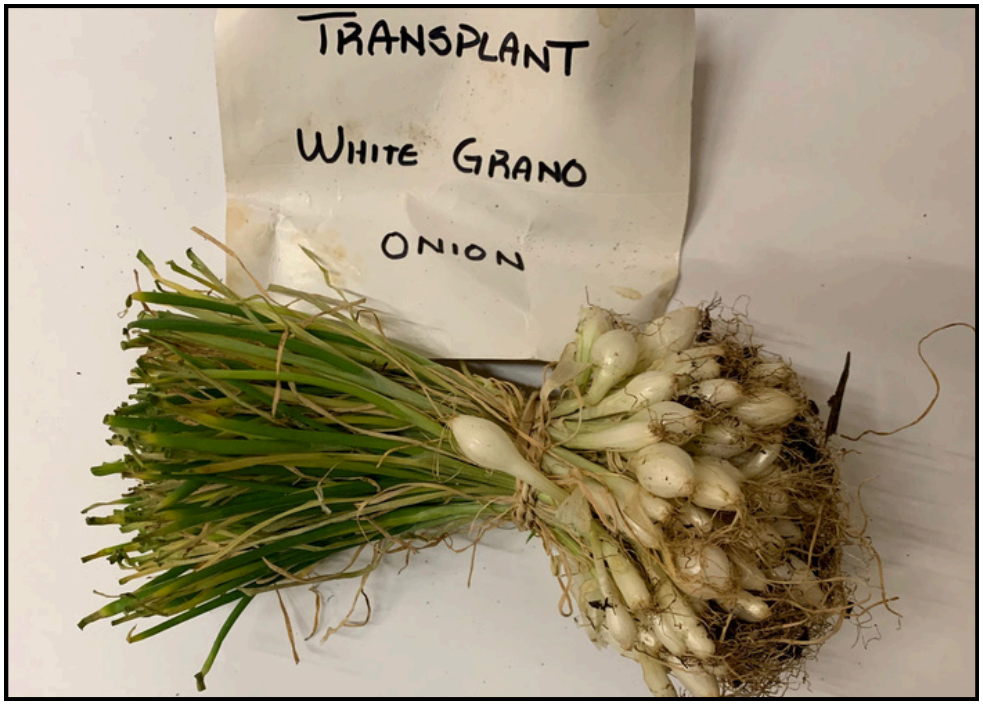
Houseplant Series, Part 2 - continued from page 2

How to Help Them Thrive
Place these plants in lower-light areas where other plants might struggle—such as hallways, offices, or rooms with indirect light. Water sparingly, and when in doubt, wait a few more days.

These are ideal plants for busy schedules or those just getting started. They don't ask for much—but when matched to the right conditions, they offer steady, reliable growth.

Next month , we'll explore a group of houseplants with a very different strategy—plants that grow quickly, adapt easily, and bring movement and softness to indoor spaces.

Onions - continued from page 3



Long day onions also do better to start in our cooler spring climate.

Any type of onion should have rich, well-drained soil, with consistent water, and regular weed control. Long-day onions benefit from periodic nitrogen feeding. Onion bulbs develop in proportion to the strength of the leaves above ground. The stronger the root (bulb), the better the leaves. Growing from small bulbs or 'sets" is not the best way to get very large onions since onions are biennials. And growing the small bulb counts as season one. Growing onions from seeds or transplants (which look like grass shoots) is a better option, since they are not primed to bloom and will put more energy into the bulb.

Test Your Knowledge on Weed Identification!

Arlene Brandt-Jenson, Master Gardener

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Look at the photos and identify the weeds. Answers are on page 7.
No peeking!

Photos by Arlene Brandt-Jenson

7

“I have seedlings for the garden. Now what?”

Candy Van Dam, Master Gardener

Before planting young seedlings, it’s recommended that they be acclimated to the great outdoors by “hardening” the plants. Hardening seedlings before transplanting increases their survival and long-term health:

*** Reduces transplant shock:** Gradual exposure to outdoor conditions helps seedlings adjust to changes in light, temperature, wind, and humidity.
*** Strengthens stems and roots:** Wind and cooler temperatures encourage sturdier stems and more robust root systems.
*** Increases cold and heat tolerance:** Acclimation helps seedlings withstand temperature swings, late frosts, or midday heat.
*** Lowers disease and pest vulnerability**: Stronger, less-stressed plants resist pathogens and pests better than sheltered seedlings.
*** Promotes faster growth:** Hardened plants establish more quickly after transplant, flower and fruit sooner, and yield better overall.

Hardening schedule
* Day 1: Put seedlings outdoors in a sheltered, shady spot for 1–2 hours, then bring them in.
* Each day add 1–2 hours and increase sun exposure gradually.
* By day 4–7 (7-day program) or day 10–14 (14-day program): seedlings should be outdoors all day and sheltered at night (or left out if nights are mild).
* On the last 2–3 days, expose to stronger sun and wind so stems thicken.

Care tips
* Reduce watering slightly (keep soil moist but not soggy).
* Protect from frost: bring plants indoors.
* Avoid fertilizing heavily during hardening.
* Provide temporary wind/sun protection.

Quick checklist before transplanting
* Seedlings show hardened features: thicker stems, less glossy leaves.
* Night temps are a safe range for the crop.
* Soil is workable and not waterlogged.

Weed Identification Answers

1. Velvetleaf, an annual that can produce thousands of seeds. The leaf is heart-shaped and velvety. If you don't control it when it's small, you could have a velvetleaf forest like this.

2. Black nightshade, a vining perennial that spreads by shallow rhizomes, and produces attractive purple flowers, making some think this is not a weed.Fairly easy to pull out, once you start pulling on a piece of the rhizome. Found in and under trees and shrubs where birds have dropped the seeds.

3. Perennial sowthistle, a rhizomatous perennial that is easily confused with Canada thistle (perennial) or prickly lettuce (annual). Produces yellow flowers, then looks like 5' tall spindly trees in the fall. Prickly lettuce has a similar leaf shape but has a spiny midrib on the bottom of the leaf, and easier to pull since it's an annual.

4. Wood sorrel, an annual that produces many seeds after you admire the dainty yellow flowers.

5. Lambsquarters, an annual that is easily pulled from the garden, but produces abundant seeds if not controlled. The photo shows a carpet of lambsquarters and was taken in mid-April in a garden plot abandoned in 2025, leaving a jungle of lambsquarters 4' tall.

6. Creeping Charlie, a low-growing perennial that produces tiny purple flowers.It spreads by rhizomes and inhabits shaded woodlands or waste areas and crowds out native vegetation. It's in the mint family, so it has square stems.

7. Leafy Spurge, a nasty noxious weed (perennial) with roots up to 20' deep.You see it a lot in road ditches where it has gotten out of control. The yellow patches that you see in roadsides are actually the bracts.One way to ID leafy spurge before flowering is the milky sticky sap that oozes out when you pull off some leaves.

The ABCs of Gardening

Bonnie Lynch, Master Gardener

The following article is a reprinted series from 2008-2009.

A is for Annual – An annual is a plant that germinates, grows to full size, flowers, sets seed, and dies within one year or a single growing season. Despite their short lives, annuals bloom profusely and may do so for weeks at a time. Familiar annuals include Alyssum, Begonias, Coleus, Marigolds, Petunias, Salvia, and Zinnias. Annuals may be sown from seed in the desired location or may be started indoors and transplanted as seedlings.

B is for Bulb – A bulb is an underground food storage organ from which leaves, flowers, and roots emerge. It is composed of overlapping fleshy scales, like those in a sliced onion. Plants called bulbs can be divided into five broad categories: true bulbs, corms, tubers, tuberous roots, and rhizomes. A true bulb (such as a tulip or daffodil) contains an embryo of the plant to come that is surrounded by layers of tissue that store food. A corm is a mass of storage tissue with a basal plate below and eyes on top (examples: crocus and gladiolus). Tubers have a mass of storage tissue with eyes, but no basal plate (such as a caladium). A tuberous-root plant has swollen, food-storing roots with eyes at the base of the stem (dahlias belong in this category). A rhizome (such as a canna) is a thickened underground stem that grows horizontally, with eyes at the top and roots below. Bulbs can be grown indoors, outdoors, and in a variety of containers. Depending on their specific blooming season, bulbs may provide beauty in spring, summer, or fall. Be certain to choose healthy bulbs and provide them with the sun, soil, and moisture they require.

C is for Cotyledon – The first leaves to appear on a seedling after it germinates. Cotyledons contain enough nutrients to feed the seed for a short period. They are not true leaves.

D is for Division – Division, or the dividing of established plants, is a common method of plant propagation. It is generally used to multiply bulbs, perennials, and shrubs. The plants are dug up and separated. Each divided section will have its own root system and one or more bulbs, giving gardeners multiple plants. It should usually be done on mature perennials every three to four years. This promotes vigorous plants and abundant blooms.

Life with Potatoes

JoAnn Christensen, Master Gardener

Growing up on a dairy farm in Minnesota, potatoes were present at every meal. Each fall, our root cellar contained a full bin of potatoes for winter meals. We grew both russets and reds.

Let's grow potatoes!

Determine which potatoes you like to eat, such as starchy or waxy. Russets are considered starchy, while red potatoes, fingerlings, and baby potatoes are considered waxy. You can purchase certified seed potatoes or use ones left from last year's harvest. Of course, the certified seed potatoes are disease-controlled and worth the purchase price. Make sure your soil is loose. Potatoes grow underground, so they need loose soil. There are several ways to plant potatoes.

1. Plant potatoes eyes up 4-6 inches deep in the ground, spaced 9-12 inches apart with one to two eyes upward
2. Plant in a plastic bucket with drainage holes
3. Plant in a grow bag
4. Plant in a potato cylinder or grow cage alternating potatoes, straw, and soil
5. Plant potatoes, tucking them into the soil and layering straw above.

Plant two weeks before the final frost. There is a possibility the emerging plants may get nipped by an unexpected frost. Emerging potato plants can be protected with frost wrap or cheesecloth. Hill plants or add soil around the emerging plants that are six inches tall. Hilling prevents the potatoes from greening. Green potatoes contain solanine, a toxic compound. Hilling potatoes also supports the plants from excess winds.

Potato pests

Pick off potato beetles and drop them in soapy water. If there are eggs on a leaf, they can be gently squished with your fingers. Potato blight is caused by a pathogen called *Phytophthora infestans*. Potato blight can be managed through crop rotation, using blight-resistant certified tubers, and keeping plants as dry as possible.

Harvest when the potato plant dies back. Don't wash the potatoes prior to storage. Allow the potatoes to cure before storing. Potato towers, planting bags, or buckets allow for easy harvest.

Reference: Rhoda Burrows, former professor and SDSU Extension Horticulture Specialist, Potatoes, How to Grow It.