

Monstera, sometimes called split leaf philodendron or Swiss cheese plant, is a popular houseplant with dramatic heart-shaped foliage. It is a member of the *Araceae* family, along with true *Philodendron*, *Scindapsus*, and *Epipremnum* (Pothos). In its native Central American rainforests, monstera plants climb trees, clinging to them with aerial roots which collect moisture from the tree bark and from the air. Wild plants have been found growing over seventy feet tall. As a houseplant, you can give your plant a moss pole or similar support to encourage it to climb. If not given support, your plant will grow horizontally, eventually reaching six feet or more. Monstera is not for the faint of heart (or small of space)!

Juvenile foliage is small and heart-shaped with no holes, but leaves on mature plants can grow well over two feet long and develop the fenestrations (perforations) that are characteristic of the plant. (It's thought that in the wild the fenestrations help keep the large leaves from being shredded by storms and wind in the tree canopy.)

The botanical name for the most common variety is *Monstera deliciosa*; it's called "monster" for its huge leaves and "delicious" because its fruit tastes like a cross between pineapple and banana. It is prized by indigenous people in its native habitat and was cultivated for centuries before being introduced into Europe around 1752. It was also used medicinally, and the roots were used in basketry and for ropes.

Houseplants rarely produce fruit, but mature plants may do so if grown in very favorable conditions. If you are so fortunate, look up how to harvest the fruit when fully ripe, as unripe fruit should not be eaten.

### **Light**

As a rainforest plant, monstera likes bright indirect light. Some direct sunlight is also okay, but not hot afternoon sun. It will even tolerate low light conditions, but its distinctive foliage won't develop as well.

### **Temperature**

Preferred temperatures range from 65° to 85°F; temperatures below 60°F may damage the foliage. While the plant is small enough to move, it likes going outdoors temporarily during the summer to a warm but shady location. Don't let it sunburn!

### **Soil & Potting**

Because in the wild most of its roots are aerial, monstera needs airflow around the roots. It is very susceptible to root rot caused by too-dense soil or overwatering. For newcomers to monstera we recommend potting it in a clear plastic pot so you can monitor the roots. Regular potting soil is not recommended; a good mix for aroids is 50% medium orchid bark, 30% pumice or perlite, and 20% potting soil. Second best would be a 50-50 mix of perlite (not pumice) and potting soil. These two mixes seem to do well in Northwest conditions.

## **Water**

Check periodically and water when the soil mix is mostly dry. Watch for new unfurling leaves and aerial roots, and mist them to encourage continued growth.

## **Fertilizer**

Fertilize spring through late summer with a balanced liquid fertilizer in the water such as Bonide Liquid Plant Food 10-10-10 or Espoma Indoor. Follow label instructions.

## **Moss Pole**

Using a moss pole and training your monstera vertically mimics the plant's natural growth habit. Because the plant will develop aerial roots and draw moisture and nutrients from the pole itself, you can keep a larger plant in a smaller (8") pot than otherwise. If so, you will need to water the pole itself as high up as the plant is growing. See Sky's information sheet "Aroid and Moss Pole Basics" for more information.

## **Varieties Most Commonly Available:**

***Monstera deliciosa*** is characterized by:

- Larger leaves
- A ruff between the leaf and the petiole
- Shorter space between the internodes

***Monstera deliciosa 'Borsigiana'*** is a subspecies characterized by:

- Smaller leaves
- Longer space between internodes
- Easier to train on moss pole (because of internodes)