



## Tradescantias Are Terrific

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

While tradescantia 'Feeling Flirty' has been declared the 2023 Houseplant of the Year for its alluring pink and lime green striped foliage, a number of the 75 species of tradescantias have been treasured as houseplants for quite some time. Also referred to as inch plants or spiderworts, there are a number of species with quite unique and attractive foliage including *T. zebrina* 'Tricolor' featuring purple and silver striped foliage, *T. pallida* 'Purple Heart' with fuzzy dark purple leaves and *T. fluminensis* 'Quicksilver' noted for its variegated green and white striped foliage.

Some species just sport mostly solid green leaves but I find these also bloom more prolifically with tiny white blossoms. *T. geniculata* (also known as *Gibasis geniculata*) is more commonly referred to as Tahitian bridal veil as the long 1 to 2 feet cascading stems bear a multitude of delicate flowers.

Regardless of what species or cultivar you adopt, care is similar for all of them. They typically exhibit a trailing habit so this makes them a prime choice for elongated or elevated pots or cache pots as well as in hanging baskets or even nestled in macrame hangers. The twisting, trailing stems will spill over a couple of feet or more as plants grow and age. If they get too long or too leggy, feel free to prune them.



Any pruned stems are easily rooted if more plants are desired. Make slightly slanted cuts about a quarter inch below a node (where leaf meets stem) creating about a 6-inch cutting. Remove the bottom inch of leaves and place in a container filled with water. Or cuttings can be stuck a couple of inches into moistened potting mix in a 4 to 6-inch pot. Remove any leaves that would be submerged into the potting mix. Place in a clear plastic bag to keep humidity high and set in a bright spot but not in direct sunlight.

Tradescantias appreciate bright light but don't need to be placed in direct sunlight, especially during the hot, sunny summer months. If the leaves lose their vibrancy, it is often because plants are not receiving enough light. You may have to try out a few locations to find the perfect spot. If using these attractive plants outside in the summer, keep them in the shade. Plants do well with temperatures between 55 and 75 F.



A well-drained potting mix is essential to healthy plants. Tradescantias like to be moderately moist but not water-logged. Overwatering will lead to root rots and/or fungus gnat infestations. Plants should not be allowed to totally dry out either. Let plants dry out slightly between waterings and then give them a good drink. Be sure to empty the saucer of any standing water. During the cooler winter season, plants are typically not in active growth so may require less water unless in an overheated room.

Fertilize plants during the spring and summer months. Use a houseplant fertilizer for foliage plants that contains the major plant nutrients as well as trace elements. Mix up a half strength batch and use it to water plants twice a month. Always be sure the potting mix is slightly moist before applying fertilizer. Also, plants don't mind being slightly pot bound. When you see roots through the drainage holes, it is time to repot. Only move plants up to a one size larger pot.

Tradescantias do not have many insect problems but may be susceptible to spider mites if grown in hot, dry conditions and fungus gnats if the potting media is kept too wet.

Try a few of these attractive plants in your home or office. Their attractive foliage is sure to merit attention and their easy growing nature makes caring for them a breeze. If you have questions about houseplants or if you have any other gardening questions, contact the UConn Home & Garden Education at (877) 486-6271 or [www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu](http://www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu) or your local Cooperative Extension Center.