

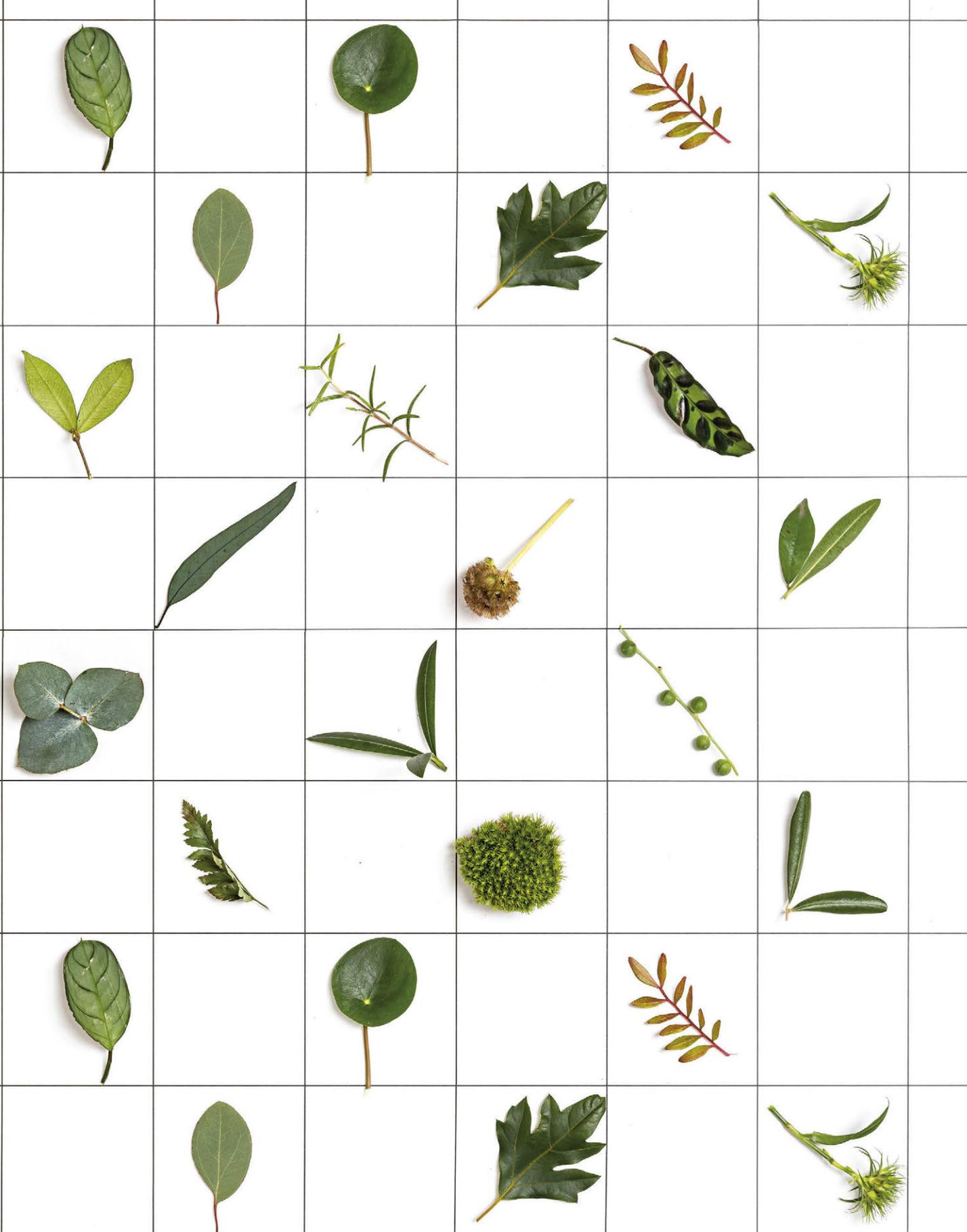
Camille Soulayrol

Plantopia

CULTIVATE · CREATE
SOOTHE · NOURISH



Flammarion







“One who
plants a
garden
plants
happiness.”



Camille Soulayrol

Photography by
Frédéric Baron-Morin

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Develop Your Green Thumb



In the following pages, Mama Petula, the high priestess of the urban jungle, shares her top tips and advice for choosing and caring for your “soul plant.” Caroline Ciepielwski, owner of Mama Petula, is a pioneer in green living. After working for others for years, this professionally trained gardener started taking on independent plant decoration projects. Eventually, she found a wonderful space in Paris’s urban art collective Grands Voisins and opened her first store, an oasis where she looks after plants as if they were her own children. Coaxing beauty from next to nothing, letting nature take control, and sharing a love of living things is the spirit behind Mama Petula.



Basic advice for absolute beginners

Rule No. 1 // Observation

Plants are just like us: living things that need water, food, light, and companionship. Sound familiar? Good. If you respect their needs, plants will become your best friends, each with its own personality. Get to know them, watch them grow, listen to them, and they'll let you know what they need. Pay attention—they have a lot to teach you.

Rule No. 2 // Light

You'll often hear it said that plants need light. This is true, but be careful. Light doesn't necessarily mean sunlight. You probably find sipping a coffee in the sun wonderful, but how does your skin feel after a long day at the beach? Depending on the plant and its needs, find it a light-filled or shady spot, but avoid direct sunlight. Houseplants are exotic plants used to living in the jungle where little sunlight penetrates the canopy. See? It's not rocket science.

Rule No. 3 // Watering: a prickly subject

Accidents often arise from our best intentions. The fact is, most people drown their plants. It's impossible to tell you precisely how much water to give your plants, because that depends on things like conditions in your house, where the plant is placed, and its size. But we'll give you some advice and recommendations. Remember, there's no replacement for interaction and observation.

TIP Water your plants more abundantly during the growing season (spring, summer, and fall) than in periods of vegetative rest (winter). Don't use cold water: room-temperature is better.

Rule No. 4 // Repotting

Every healthy plant grows and needs more and more space, just like you. You'll know when the time has come by looking at its roots: if you start to see them curling around the soil in a ball, the plant is suffocating. You should repot it in a pot at least $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (2 cm) larger, fill in with good-quality soil (rich in nutrients) or add fertilizer if the soil is too poor, and let it grow.

Rule 5 // The container

Plastic pots should be banished, especially those that don't allow water to drain away. There's nothing worse for a plant than stagnant water. Use earthen pots instead.

Rule 6 // Attention

Plants need love, friendship, companionship—whatever you want to call it. It might sound crazy, but I know it's true. "Anyone with plants will tell you the same thing," says Mama Petula. They need care and attention. Don't abandon them when you go on vacation, do talk to them when you get home from work, and look after them tenderly.

To own a plant is to show a healthy respect for living things.



No-stress plants for the novice

Calathea

Easy-going

Common name: Peacock plant

Measuring around 8 in. (20 cm) tall, this strikingly patterned plant grows quickly and tends to expand out, rather than up.

Bonus: It prefers shade to light and likes moist environments and regular watering.



Begonia maculata

Generous

Common name: Polka-dot begonia

This plant will make you the queen of cuttings, enough to astound even your most green-fingered of relations. This flowering plant with patterned leaves grows before your very eyes and prefers shade to light.

Bonus: It grows rapidly but also gets really thirsty. So be vigilant and remember to water it regularly.



Fittonia

Striking

Common name: Nerve plant

The eye-catching veins on this ground-cover plant look like they were drawn with a felt-tipped marker. Mama Petula nicknames it “the pouf plant” because it grows into a shape resembling a comfortable beanbag. It likes gentle light and doesn’t do well in direct sun. It needs spare but regular watering.

Bonus: Don’t worry, it will let you know when it’s thirsty: it wilts, but perks up as soon as you water it.





Pilea peperomioides

The hipster

Common name: Chinese money plant

Pilea is considered a lucky charm in China because of its coin-shaped leaves. According to legend, it will bring prosperity if you bury a coin in the soil (I'll try it and let you know). It likes sunlight and needs regular watering, so check the soil once or twice a week.

Bonus: It's a great plant for taking cuttings.



Pteris faurei

Thirsty

Common name: Fern

This plant is for anyone who's a little heavy-handed with the watering can. Sound familiar? It does to me. Ferns belong to the group of plants that make up forest undergrowth. As such, they need little light and a lot of water. Be careful to respect their love of shade and moisture. They would be very happy in a terrarium.

Bonus: Ferns do well in bathrooms and basements.

Monstera deliciosa

Extroverted

Common name: Swiss cheese plant, monster fruit, split-leaf philodendron

Monstera deliciosa is a bold and energetic climbing plant that grows as vigorously inside as it does in the jungle, giving an exotic touch to interior spaces.

Mama Petula lovingly refers to it as “jungle weed” because it loves life and grows rapidly pretty much anywhere. It has quite an appetite and needs an abundance of nutrients, water, and light.

Bonus: You can take many cuttings for friends and family (see page 28).





Aeschynanthus

The flowering hanging plant

Common name: Lipstick plant

Measuring about 16 in. (40 cm) in length, this plant needs light but not direct sun. Check every ten days to see if it needs water. If it starts to lose its leaves, it's high time to water.

Bonus: The flowers are dazzling.



Senecio rowleyanus

The “hip” hanging plant

Common name: String of pearls

This forgiving trailing plant will tolerate forgetfulness, so give it a try. This succulent grows to around 12 in. (30 cm). As

a hanging plant, it will do well on the corner of a dresser or in a homemade macramé hanger (see page 98). It needs light (remember, light doesn't mean direct sunlight) and moderate watering; in other words, about once every two weeks. But nothing can replace getting your hands in the soil and giving it regular attention.

Bonus: This is the perfect plant for getting started—it's very tolerant of forgetful beginners.

TIP Hanging plants are often located in high places where heat rises, so they will probably need more water than desk-top plants.

2. Add a layer of clay pebbles at the bottom of the pot to keep the roots from blocking the hole. This will help good drainage.

1. Find an old, damaged pot. Wrap it in a towel and break it into small pieces using a hammer, then place a few crocks at the bottom of your new pot. This will prevent soil from blocking the drainage hole(s).

3. Choose a pot $\frac{3}{4}$ – $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. (2–3 cm) larger than your plant.

4. Remember to give it a treat: finish with a little fertilizer (plant food).



Repotting

Plants grow, just like us. Remember how uncomfortable you felt as a growing kid in too-tight clothes? Give plants more space by transferring them to larger pots, ideally $\frac{3}{4}$ – $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. (2–3 cm) larger. You should do this every two to three years. Really robust plants may need to be repotted more often.

Plants on sale are often cultivated in poor conditions, so be careful when making your purchase. You may find they've been cramped and were waiting for you to come along and free them.

Determining if a plant needs to be repotted is very simple: it will let you know. Remove the pot and look at the roots. If they are wrapped around the soil, as illustrated in the image opposite, it means they don't have enough space. They are knotting up and may suffocate the plant. It's time to act. It's also a good time to add compost and nourish the plant with a little fertilizer. Finish with a good watering and your plant is set to grow.

TIP Roots, like vampires, love to hide in soil and hate the light. Keep this in mind when repotting and avoid extended exposure to the sun.



Taking cuttings

This method for propagating plants is a cinch. Give plant cuttings a try and watch your house transform into a wizard's workshop. The results can be quite magical.

The secret: Cuttings are most successful when taken during a growing season, especially in spring.



1. Cut the stem on the diagonal with a clean tool (knife, scissors, or shears). Always remove the cutting above a node on the mother plant, then cut once more below a node on the cutting itself.

2. Remove any leaves from the base of the stem. There should be no leaves below the water line.

3. Place the stem in a vase or a bottle and add a little water. Let the cutting soak and watch the roots develop. Change the water if necessary.

4. When the roots are over 1/4 in. (3 cm) long, you can transfer the plant to a pot.



aerial
roots

Propagating a Swiss cheese plant

Monstera fans, this is for you! These generous plants are easy to propagate through cuttings. This quick lesson will have you planting them all over your house and treating your friends to some plants of their own.

Find a branch with a short aerial root growing from it. As before, cut above a node and put the stem in a transparent vase so that you can watch the roots develop. When the roots are $1\frac{1}{4}$ –2 in. (3–5 cm) long, you're ready to repot: you've got yourself a new plant.

You can also just leave it in a transparent jar and watch the long roots grow.





This attractive houseplant is also easy to propagate through cuttings: you'll make a lot of people happy. And remember, it brings good luck.

Propagating a *Pilea*

DIY



1. Using your fingers, separate the plantlet (young plant) from the mother plant without removing it from the soil.

2. Using a small knife, cut vertically into the compost, making sure you include several of the plantlet's roots. Cut deeply and cleanly.

3. Once the plantlet is removed, make sure there are roots attached so you can repot it.

4. Place clay pebbles and soil in a container (as described on p. 26) and repot the plantlet. Water it well. Slip a coin in the soil and get ready to meet Lady Luck.



Terrariums

Noam Levy, the owner of Green Factory, has helped popularize terrariums in France and beyond. He's been experimenting with these "mini worlds" for over ten years, exploring the possibilities they provide for greening up our homes and lives. His creations illustrate life lived in harmony with nature and show us how we might live together intelligently.

While we may dream of living surrounded by plants, their needs are often very different from ours. The terrarium technique enables humans and plants to thrive under the same roof. Living together in harmony, each in its own perfect ecosystem: if only such a thing existed for couples ...

What is a terrarium?

Terrariums are small-scale reproductions of the life cycle, from photosynthesis to the water cycle. They're little miracles, really. Having a terrarium at home is to be reminded of life's essentials on a daily basis.

Key advice A terrarium is a small, self-sufficient world. It doesn't need to be watered regularly; one or two waterings a year should suffice. It needs light, but not direct sun.

Golden rule

For a successful terrarium, choose plants that will flourish in this environment. Don't hesitate to consult a specialist before you get started.

We've put together two DIY methods for creating your own terrarium: the **closed terrarium**, designed to preserve the water cycle and condensation formation, and the **open terrarium**. The plants in each environment are, of course, very different, so choose the one you prefer. But remember, nothing's stopping you from making one of each.

DIY Closed terrarium

Supplies

- green plants that like moisture (such as fern, creeping fig, dwarf begonias, or ivy)
- glass jar
- pumice or clay pebbles
- fine gravel, in different colors if desired
- soil mixed with a little coarse sand
- moss
- decorative rocks and stones

1. Line the bottom of a glass jar with a 1¼ in. (3 cm) layer of pumice. Add the gravel in several layers to create an attractive visual contrast.

2. Pour a ¾–1¼ in. (2–3 cm) layer of soil on the pumice and make a small well for your plants.

3. Slightly loosen the plants' root balls by carefully squeezing them in your hands. Place them in the well and press firmly so that they sink an inch or so into the soil, down to the pumice.

4. Place the moss around the plants, green side up, and arrange the rest of the rocks and stones decoratively. Be careful not to pack the soil too tightly.

5. Clean the interior and exterior of the container. Pour water down the walls using a quick, circular motion, and lightly water the soil surface.



TIPS A wet terrarium should always remain closed, except when temperatures spike. The temperature inside a glass container is on average 20° F (10° C) hotter than room temperature. In case of a heat wave, open the terrarium to lower the temperature. To determine if the plant is too hot, check to see if large drops are dripping down the jar's interior. If they are, it's sweating too much. However, a little condensation is perfectly normal. Once it's been planted, never water a terrarium, but do spray it once a year with distilled water. To clean the container, use water and a little paper towel and perhaps a bit of white vinegar if it's really grimy. Never place a terrarium in direct sun, but do give it lots of light.



inspiration

Fun with foliage

It's entirely possible to have a healthy respect for nature without taking yourself too seriously. Try this humorous approach to decorating with plants.



Washi tape, stickers, markers ... Anything goes when it comes to having fun. Adding a polka dot or two with a marker won't hurt your plant, so feel free to draw on the leaves. Try decorating the pots, too.

Adding a few stickers won't do anything worse than slow photosynthesis a little, so don't wait until Halloween to dress up your plants.

“Fantasy is an
eternal spring.”

–Johann Friedrich von Schiller



*To cure your fear
of overwatering*

TIP There are some plants that live entirely submerged in water, and others whose roots grow in water (ideal for flat-shaped vases).

