

Millennials are bringing back the humble houseplant

The Instagram generation discovers its green thumb, spotting plants on social media, then incorporating them into home decor.

By Laurie Junker Special to the Star Tribune | FEBRUARY 6, 2018 -- 12:55PM

Cue the Carole King, and hike up those high-waisted jeans — the 1970s are calling, and they want us to fall in love with houseplants again. Except it's not a call. It's a photo on Pinterest or Instagram, and the people inspired by it probably don't know the "Tapestry" album by heart, because they were born decades after it was released. Many of today's young homeowners and renters are learning about and appreciating this humble home accessory for the first time.

Popular Instagram feeds like [The Jungalow \(https://www.jungalow.com/\)](https://www.jungalow.com/), by California designer Justina Blakeney, show off her signature "new bohemian" home style, overflowing with groupings of houseplants in colorful, layered and eclectic spaces that recall the "hippie" chic look of a different era.

The more modern, paler look of Swedish blogger Nikl Brantmark's [MyScandinavianHome \(http://www.myscandinavianhome.com/\)](http://www.myscandinavianhome.com/) also features indoor plants but less like a jungle and more like a single piece of furniture or art, where they provide a welcome burst of green in an otherwise whitewashed space.

Phone in hand

Edina florist Amy Backman, owner of [Spruce Flowers & Home \(https://sprucemn.com/\)](https://sprucemn.com/), has seen a big increase in interest and demand for green plants in the past five years, especially from younger people who see them on their social media feeds. These buyers often walk into her shop, phone in hand, and say, "I want that plant," not always knowing what "that" plant is or whether their space or lifestyle is well suited to it.

"Fiddle-leaf figs have been really popular, and you see a lot of tall and gorgeous varieties on Instagram," said Backman. "The problem is that those plants in the photo are probably several years old, and the starter varieties are much smaller, which is often a disappointment. They can also be a bit finicky and go through ups and downs during the year, where sometimes they look great, and sometimes they look a little sick. So I help educate my customers who are new to indoor plants."

The popularity of contemporary and midcentury modern home style means that plants with a minimal look, like succulents, are also in demand. They're a good choice for people who are likely to neglect them, as they do best when left alone.

Similarly modern in form is the Chinese money plant, which has smooth pancake-shaped leaves on long, thin green stems that spring out in every direction like an Ikea light fixture. Easy to care for, they're known as the friendship plant because a stem cut from it will root in a glass of water and can be planted in soil and given to a friend (a good thing, because Chinese money plants tend to be pricey).

For homeowners who want a plant that requires more care and nurturing (and for many young people, especially those without yards or children, that's part of the appeal), fiddle-leaf figs are a good choice because they need more careful watering, fertilizing and leaf polishing for optimum health.

Inspired by Pinterest

Emily Boole, 24, has a growing collection of plants in her northeast Minneapolis duplex, some that she inherited from friends who were moving and some that she acquired after becoming "obsessed" with them on Pinterest.

"I have a home-design inspiration board, and I think every single picture has a plant in it," she said. Her favorites are a two-year-old ponytail palm and a mother-in-law's tongue that she first spotted on Pinterest.

"They make me feel happy," she said. "I enjoy caring for them, and I think they help keep the air cleaner and more humid, which is important since I have asthma."

Millennials' enthusiasm for their new hobby can rub off on older generations who may have thrown in the towel, along with their shedding Boston ferns, around 1980. Scott Endres sees that dynamic in his south Minneapolis garden center, TangleTown Gardens, which has seen a big increase in houseplant sales over the past few years.

"Young people get interested in houseplants, and may ask their parent or grandparent for care tips, triggering memories and nostalgia that often translates into renewed interest," he said. And while an Instagram photo may prompt the initial visit, Endres thinks it's the tangible experience of seeing, smelling and touching green plants and sharing information with other plant lovers that keeps people coming back and adding more plants to their collection.

"Social media is great and provides plant inspiration from all over the world, but I think what people really crave are experiences," he said. "Learning about and caring for a living plant provides that."

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Emily Boole enjoys taking care of plants in her northeast Minneapolis duplex. "They make me feel happy," she said.