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Cordyline: The Complete Guide to Growing and Care Tips



Photo Credit: Mang Kelin

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Growing Cordyline: Watering, Lighting, Propagation, and Pests

By Jennifer Keating

Last Updated: January 2, 2025



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Check out the vibrant color and dagger-like leaves of this tropical plant! Cordyline is a showstopper that brings exotic flair to almost any setting. It's usually grown as a houseplant but can also be planted in containers or on

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the landscape in warmer climates. Learn all about caring for cordyline.

About Cordyline

Cordylines are members of the Asparagaceae family and cousins to agave. It's a broadleaf perennial that is winter hardy in Zones 9 to 11, so it's treated as a houseplant or a container plant that's winterized in most areas. The large leathery leaves add drama and an architectural feel, whether you dream of a towering outdoor specimen or a compact houseplant.

Among the 15 species and many more varieties, Cordylines have distinctive leaf shapes, sizes, and colors: foliage shades range from pink, red, purple, and green to orange and white, often in combinations. Many cordylines produce flowers followed by berries; container plants outdoors seldom bloom, but houseplants may.



Cordyline fruticosa. Credit: Witsawat. S,
Shutterstock

The most common species among home gardeners is *Cordyline fruticosa*, which in temperate zones typically winters indoors as a houseplant and summers on a porch, patio, or poolside.

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This plant also boasts a rich history, from the mythical allure of the Ti plant, which is believed to ward off evil spirits, to the practical use of its leaves as a cabbage substitute.

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PLANTING

Where to Plant

Outdoors: If you want to keep this species outdoors year-round, you'll need to live in a tropical or subtropical climate with warm, frost-free areas. Choose a sheltered spot in your garden. Their long sword-like leaves can tear if they're exposed to strong winds. Most varieties need bright, full sun, which enhances their vivid colors; however, if you live in a particularly hot area, they would benefit from partial shade to prevent leaf scorch.

To plant, dig a hole twice as wide and slightly deeper than the root ball, and then add compost and fertilizer to the soil. Place the root-ball in the hole, making sure the top is level with the ground, and fill the hole. Keep the plant moist until it's fully established, but don't overwater.

Containers: Cordyline grows brilliantly in containers, and this is a great option for those areas where the plant will need to be brought indoors over winter. Keep the plant outdoors in containers during warmer months when ~~any threat of frost has passed. Cordyline in a~~

container requires a generous base (it develops a taproot), so choose a tall pot with a width of at least 6 inches greater than that of the root ball; go larger if other plants will be grown with the cordyline.

Houseplants: As a houseplant, cordyline needs a moderate level of care.

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- Light: Set in bright light, but avoid direct sunlight.
- Moisture: The soil needs to stay moist. Only reduce watering in the winter; just water when the surface is dry.
- Temperature: Temperatures must be above 62°
- Humidity: These plants prefer a high-humidity environment and may experience leaf drops without humidity.

All potted plants need rich, well-draining soil with a neutral pH (between 6.0 and 7.0); the exact soil type will depend on the variety.

- For example, *C. fruticosa* needs a rich, well-draining, peaty potting mix (a blend of fine and coarse material with 30% to 50% organic matter) with a pH of 6.0 to 6.5.
- *C. australis* is less particular, but a potting mix amended with compost is preferable for it.

Propagating Cordyline

Cordyline can be grown by taking cuttings or from seed.

Growing these plants from seed requires patience and lots of attention, and it will take years for a seed to develop into a sizable plant, but it can be a rewarding endeavor.

The most popular method for planting cordyline plants is to take a cutting from a mature plant.

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Cordyline can be propagated from cuttings (aka “Ti logs”) by using the following steps:

1. Cut a 3- to 5-inch piece from a leafy head and remove all foliage. (Cut the top of the stem at a slight angle to indicate which end should be up.)
2. Dip the bottom end in the rooting hormone.
3. Prepare a mix of sand and peat moss or perlite and dampen it.
4. Insert the stem into the mix.

Alternatively, a cutting can also be placed in water to a depth of about one-third of its length.

Place the cutting in a room with a temperature of at least 60°F where it will receive bright but indirect sunlight and maintain its dampness.

Shoots will appear in 4 to 8 weeks (or longer, depending on conditions)—plant when the cuttings have four to six leaves.

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GROWING



Cordyline Plant (Young Cabbage Tree).
Credit: Burning Bright, Shutterstock

How to Care for Cordyline Outdoors

Light: For the best color, place multicolor cordylines in dappled light; protect them from direct sun, which can burn their leaves. Green-leaved plants do best in direct sun.

Water: Water regularly; cordylines like consistently moist soil but not “wet feet” (standing water) from spring to fall. *C. fruticosa* grown as a houseplant requires watering when the surface of the soil feels dry; provide enough water to cause it to flow out of the container.

Fertilize: Fertilize in spring, if desired, with a granular, slow-release formula or apply a balanced liquid formula at half-strength weekly. Avoid fertilizing in winter.

Pruning

A healthy plant should have stems of varying heights and, depending on the variety, usually grow up to 3 to 4 feet.

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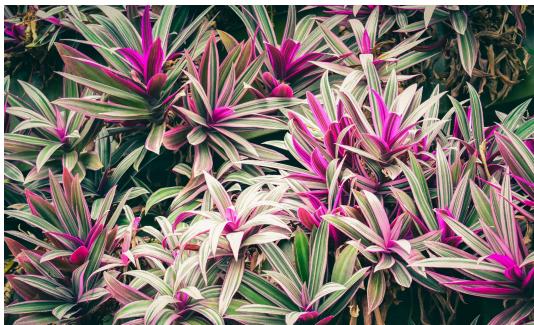
If the stem becomes leggy and/or the foliage unattractive, in late winter, remove the foliage top, leaving 1 foot of bare stem. New growth will emerge.

Overwintering

Overwinter cordyline in a bright, sunny spot in a home or greenhouse at 60°F or higher. Reduce watering and provide humidity indoors. Consider placing the plant in a bathroom, setting it on a bed of wet pebbles, and/or misting the foliage.

Yellow foliage could indicate overwatering, too much sunlight, and/or drafts. To address, reduce watering and/or move the plant out of direct sunlight and away from drafts.

Types



Stunning *C. fruticosa*. Credit: Chris F,
Pexels

- ***Cordyline banksii* ‘Sprilecpink’, aka Electric Pink:** hardy in Zones 9 to 11; 4 to 8 feet tall; dark maroon spikes with brilliant pink edges
- ***C. fruticosa* ‘Exotica’:** hardy in Zones 10 to 12; 3 to 5 feet tall; variegated green, cream, and pink green leaves
- ***C. fruticosa* ‘Red Sister’:** hardy in Zones 9 to 12; up to 6 feet tall; foliage emerges bright pink before gradually darkening to cherry red with burgundy variegation
- ***C. fruticosa* ‘Singapore Twist’:** hardy in Zones 9 to 11; up to 8 feet tall; green leaves with burgundy undersides and bright pink stems in fan form
- ***C. australis* ‘New Zealand Cabbage Tree’:** hardy in Zones 9 to 11; grows from 6 to 30 feet tall; broadleaf ever-green leaves in a variety of colors.

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PESTS/DISEASES

Cordyline are pretty resistant to most pests and diseases, but can sometimes suffer with root rot and mealybugs.

Root rot occurs when you overwater these plants. They like to be kept moist, but not soggy! Watch out for drooping or yellow leaves—this will be your first sign that you're overwatering.

Mealybugs are pests that cause yellow and distorted leaves. You'll find them under leaves and near stems. Telltale signs include finding sooty mold which they secrete after sucking the sap from the plant. To remove, isolate the plant and treat it with soapy water, [neem oil](#), or insecticidal soap.

Other diseases and pests to watch out for include:

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Diseases: bacterial leaf spot, fungal leaf spot, Fusarium root rot.

Pests: fungus gnats, scale insects, spider mites, thrips.

Other Common Problems

Brown-tip foliage indoors usually indicates the plant is under-watered or too dry. Try watering your plant and placing it somewhere with more humidity.

Yellow leaves may be a sign your plant is receiving too little water. You don't want the soil to be soggy, but you want to keep it moist. Make sure to water your plant when the topsoil is dry.

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Sometimes , cordyline can grow much bigger than you want them to. This problem is easily solved; simply cut them down to the height you want them to be.



C. australis 'Red Star'. Credit: Emilio Sánchez Hernández

Summary

To summarize, cordyline is a versatile and vibrant plant that thrives in the right conditions.

Ensure they have the correct soil amendments, light and water requirements, and

you'll be rewarded with striking foliage for your outdoor or indoor space.

WIT AND WISDOM

- The name “cordyline” comes from the Greek *kordyle*, meaning “club,” which describes the appearance of the plant’s root system. This led to another common name, the club palm.
- Do not confuse cordyline with dracaena. The plants may look alike, but they differ at the root: Cordyline roots are white, while dracaena roots are orange.
- According to the [University of Hawaii](#), [Kapi‘olani Community College](#), “There is a legend that states that if there is a suspicion of a shark or supernatural creature in the water, you can place a Ti leaf in it to determine if it is safe. If the Ti leaf sinks, it is dangerous, and if it floats, it is safe to enter.”
- Legend has it that *Cordyline australis* was given one of its common names, cabbage tree, by British naval explorer James Cook while visiting New Zealand (the plant’s native habitat) because he found its edible foliage to be a suitable substitute for that vegetable.
- Its cousin, *C. fruticosa* (formerly *C. terminalis*)

charmed early Polynesians into thinking that it had magical powers and that its presence could protect members of a household from evil spirits.

HOUSEPLANT GUIDES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Jennifer is the Digital Editor at The Old Farmer's Almanac. She is an active equestrian and spends much of her free time at the barn. When she's not riding, she loves caring for her collection of house plants, baking, and playing in her gardens. [Read More from Jennifer Keating](#)

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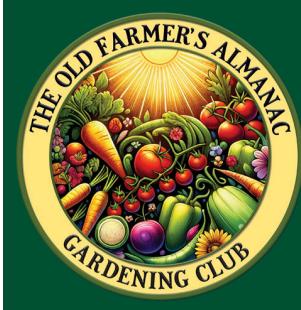
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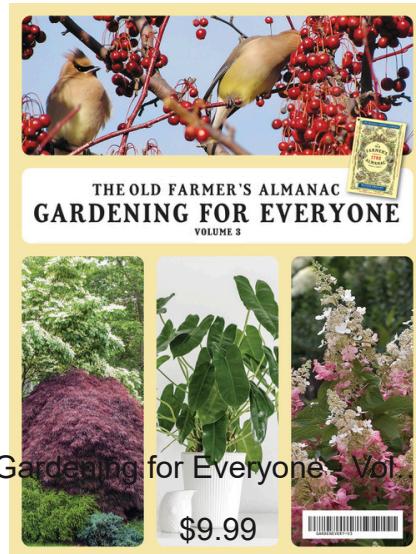
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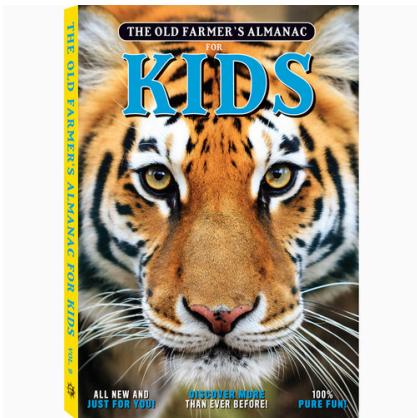
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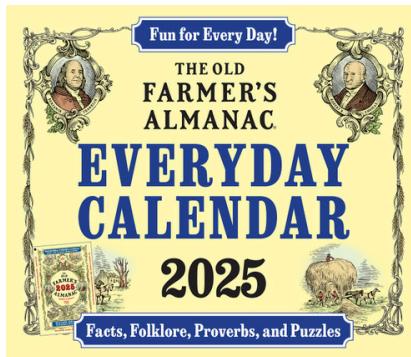
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