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How to Care for Snake Plants



Photo Credit: Myroslava Bozhko/Shutterstock

Botanical Name: *Dracaena fragrans* (formerly: *Sansevieria* spp.)

Plant Type: [Houseplant](#)

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Growing Snake Plants: Watering, Lighting, Propagation, and Pests

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)

Last Updated: February 6, 2025



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We love snake plants! Also known as “Mother-in-Law’s Tongue” and Sansevieria, these are one of the easiest houseplants to care for. This striking succulent plant is very forgiving and perfect for beginners, but they are beloved by experienced plant parents, too. Here’s how to care for a snake plant in your home!

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About Snake Plants

Native to southern Africa, snake plants are well adapted to conditions similar to those in southern regions of the United States. Because of this, they may be grown outdoors almost all year in USDA Zone 8 and warmer. However, they spread by sending out under-

ground runners and may become invasive, so treat snake plants like you would [bamboo](#); plant it only in contained areas or pots.

Too much water and freezing temperatures are two of the very few things that can affect this plant in a significant way. Soggy soil will cause root rot, and extended exposure to cold temperatures can damage the foliage.

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PLANTING

How to Plant Snake Plants

- Choose a pot with a drainage hole in the bottom. Terracotta pots work well for snake plants since they allow the soil to dry out more quickly than plastic pots.

- Use a well-draining potting mix. A potting mix designed for cacti and succulents is ideal, as it will be more resistant to becoming over-saturated with water.
- When repotting snake plants, don't bury them too deep. The plant should be planted as deep as it had been in its prior container.

Choosing a Location in the Home

- Snake plants prefer bright, indirect light and can even tolerate some direct sunlight. However, they also grow well (albeit more slowly) in shady corners and other low-light areas of the home.
 - **Tip:** Avoid moving your plant from a low-light area to direct sunlight too quickly, as this can shock the plant. Whenever you move plants from a darker to a lighter spot, gradually expose them to brighter and brighter light over a week or so. Also, be sure to adjust watering habits

accordingly; plants will use more water in warmer, brighter areas.

- Keep the plant in a warm spot with temperatures above 50°F (10°C). In the winter, protect it from drafty windows.



Photo by Mokie/Wikimedia Commons

GROWING

How to Water Snake Plants

One of the most common problems encountered with snake plants (and other succulents) is overwatering. These plants do not tolerate soggy soil; they tend to develop root rot. To avoid this, follow these watering practices:

- Do not water too frequently. Let the soil mostly dry out between waterings.
 - **Tip:** To know when it's time to water, don't just rely on how the surface of the soil looks. Instead, carefully stick your finger or a wooden chopstick a couple of inches into the soil. Hold off watering if you feel any moisture or see soil sticking to the chopstick.
- Water from the bottom of the pot, if possible. This encourages the roots to grow downward and deep, helping to stabilize the thick, tall leaves.
- During the winter, while the plant isn't actively growing, water less often than you would in spring and summer.

Caring for Snake Plants

- The large, flat leaves tend to collect dust; wipe them down with a damp cloth as needed.
- Snake plants are rapid growers in good conditions and may need to

be divided annually.

- Divide and repot in the spring. Cut out a section containing leaves and roots and place it in a pot with a well-draining potting mix.
- If a snake plant is pot-bound, it may flower occasionally. Fragrant, greenish-white flower clusters appear on tall spikes.

Types

- *Dracaena trifasciata* (a.k.a. *Sansevieria trifasciata*) is the most common species of snake plant. It has tall, dark-green leaves with light grayish-green horizontal stripes.
 - **'Bantel's Sensation'** — Narrow leaves have white vertical stripes and grow to about 3 feet long. This variety can be hard to find.
- *D. hahnii*:
 - **'Bird's Nest'** — Short, wide leaves of dark and light green form a tight nest shape like a

bromeliad. Leaves only grow 6 to 8 inches long. This variety does need much light to grow well.

- **‘Golden Hahnii’** — Like the standard ‘Bird’s Nest’ but with leaves variegated along the edge in yellow.
- ***D. cylindrica*:**
 - **‘Cylindrical Snake Plant’** — As its name suggests, this species of snake plant has cylindrical leaves that end in a fierce point.
 - **‘Starfish Snake Plant’** — The starfish snake plant has cylindrical leaves that fan out from its base, giving it a starfish-like shape.
- ***D. masoniana*:**
 - **‘Whale Fin’** — These interesting snake plants have large, wide leaves that resemble the fin of a whale breaching the water’s surface.

GARDENING PRODUCTS

PESTS/DISEASES

- **Root rot** due to overwatering is the most common issue.
 - If this occurs, remove any dying leaves and allow the plant to dry out more than usual. Snake plants are resilient and typically recover. However, if the plant continues to die, remove it from its pot, discard any rotted roots and leaves, and repot in fresh soil.
- **Scale insects**

WIT AND WISDOM

- According to NASA Research, snake plants, spider plants, and peace lilies are reportedly very effective at cleaning the air, removing toxins such as formaldehyde. However, further studies are needed to determine the true extent of these plants' air-purifying capabilities!

- *Dracaena trifasciata*, a type of snake plant native to tropical Africa, yields a strong plant fiber and was once used to make bow strings for hunting. For this reason, it also goes by the name Bowstring Hemp.

HOUSEPLANT GUIDES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Boeckmann



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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COMMENTS

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Debbie (not verified) 2 weeks ago

I bought a snake plant from a cutting that had light green of the sides of the leaf, mine are growing & propagating, but all leaves are only green. Help

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[REPLY](#)

The Editors 1 week 6 days ago

Hi Debbie,

When a new snake plant is created from a cutting its unique foliage patterns, such as variegation, mottled leaves, and different colored edge, are usually lost and most plants will end up with sin-

gle green color. In order to propagate a new plant that looks exactly like the original—with the same leaf coloring—you need to divide the original plant.

Hope this helps!

REPLY

Nazerhussain A... (not verified) 10

months 3 weeks ago

Very good

REPLY

Ellen Smart (not verified) 1 year 8 months

ago

All the guides I have found say to plant the draceana at the same depth it was in the old pot. I think it was too deep in the old pot -- another time, too shallow. Please please please please tell us the corm/root should be X inches below the surface. Or the base

of the growing leaf should be X inches below or at or above.

REPLY

Samantha (not verified) 2 years 2 months ago

55 years ago when my daughter was born, my husbands buddies from college sent me a snake plant. I cannot tell you how many people have received "pups" from this plant and it goes on and on. I can also be propagated by cutting a leaf and sticking that in damp vermiculite or even just water and placing in indirect light where it will root and also go on and on if cared for properly.

REPLY

Marizon (not verified) 2 years 2 months ago

Snake plants

Please check, the name of this plant was changed to Dracaena Trifasciata.

Please update your article.

Thank you, M

REPLY

Kitty (not verified) 2 years 2

months ago

Who Changed the name to
Dracaena. It has never been a
Dracaena. It is considered a
Succulent and a member of the
Lilly Family, hence the low water-
ing needs. People make up names.
But all my books and research do
not say it is a Dracaena.
Sansevierias are a native of Africa
more particularly, laurentii is na-
tive of the N.E. Congo in Africa.
"Variegated snake plant" or
"Goldband Sansevieria" It can
grow to 1/2 to 1-1/2 meters high.

REPLY

Kitty (not verified) 2 years 2

months ago

Well I did some more research and according to the The Angiosperm Phylogeny Group, they are using DNA to reidentify plants. ARGGG! "The Genus FKA Sansevieria was reclassified in 2014 by scientists Pei-Luen Lu and Clifford Morden after a phylogenetic analysis of the genera (plural of genus) Dracaena, Sansevieria, They found that Sansevieria is a unique group, but that it is descended from Dracaena." So all you growers out there, change your plant tags! LOL

REPLY

Kitty (not verified) 2 years 2 months ago

The variety shown in the photos with the yellow stripes on the sides of the plant are: Sansevieria trifasciata laurentii. I don't know why FA doesn't label their photos of

variety, and zones if applicable. Having a Horticulture Degree and I am finding plants in nursery's with less and less information and it is frustrating. I need to know, Zone, Hight, Width, sun and watering, and full variety of plants. Growers aren't supplying this information and it is wrong to assume people know how to plant and were to plant.

[REPLY](#)

Sheilah Perry-... (not verified) 2 years 2 months ago

My snake pkant grows in a full bucket of water!

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