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How to Care for Dieffenbachia Plants



Photo Credit: Ekaterina_str

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Caring and Propagating Dieffenbachia (Dumb Cane)

By [Lauren Landers](#)

Last Updated: February 13, 2025



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Also known as the dumb cane or leopard lily, dieffenbachia is a beginner-level houseplant that tolerates low to medium light. Its colorful leaves are perfect for brightening dark corners where other houseplants won't grow! Learn how to keep dieffenbachia happy and thriving for many years with our plant care guide.

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About Dieffenbachia Plant

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In the wild, dieffenbachia grows as under-story plants in the dappled light of humid rainforests throughout South and Central America. They can be grown outdoors in North America but only in hardiness Zones 10 through 12. Indoors, these plants prefer similar conditions and thrive in bright, indirect sun and high humidity. That said, dieffenbachia isn't that picky about its environment and can tolerate average indoor humidity and low light, too!

When dieffenbachia are cultivated in the garden, they can stretch up to 10 feet tall and occasionally produce subtle, greenish-white blooms similar to peace lily flowers. As houseplants, dieffenbachia usually stay much smaller and rarely bloom—but that doesn't detract from their charms! Even without their flowers, dieffenbachia delights with large, thick leaves that often come in variegated, patterned leaves displaying speckles, splotches, or stripes in shades of green, cream, yellow, or white.



Dieffenbachia plant grows well in bright, indirect light. Credit: KELENY

Most growers keep dieffenbachia as a tabletop or floor plant in bedrooms, offices, and living room spaces. However,

this plant's humidity needs and make your home a little greener.

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One warning, though—dieffenbachia are toxic and should be kept away from small children and pets!

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PLANTING

atures between 60° and 75°F, which works well for a house environment.

While dieffenbachia can be grown in any well-draining container, terracotta pots are ideal as they dry out quickly and can ward off root rot. Small dieffenbachia can be grown in 4- to 6-inch wide containers, but larger plants need roomy 10- to 14-inch pots for proper growth. Healthy dieffenbachia plants grow fast, so it's wise to repot them every year in spring!



Dumb Cane (*Dieffenbachia Exotica*) leaf close-up. Credit: Sajis De Silva

How to Repot Dieffenbachia

Before repotting dieffenbachia, don your gardening gloves. Dieffenbachia sap is a skin irritant!

your other hand to wriggle the roots free from the pot. If the pot isn't budging, use a butter knife to loosen the soil around the pot's rim.

2. Add a few inches of well-draining potting mix to the base of your new growing container and position your plant in the pot so it's at the same level it was growing in its old container.

3. Fill the space around your plant's roots with more potting soil, and then firm the soil around the plant's stems to keep them upright.

4. Water well and place your plant friend in a location with indirect sun if possible.

GROWING

There are about 50 species of dieffenbachia plants, but only a few of them are common enough to be sold at plant nurseries. Leaf size, color, and variegation patterns vary between dieffenbachia species, but most dieffenbachia have the same ba-

Most types of dieffenbachia prefer bright, filtered light and east- or west-facing windows, but these plants can also be grown in shade. Just remember that lower light conditions will slow their growth, while too much direct sun can scorch their leaves. To keep dieffenbachia from stretching towards the light, rotate your plant's pot a quarter turn every time you water.

Water

Dieffenbachia prefers consistently moist soil but is vulnerable to overwatering and root rot. To avoid watering issues, keep dieffenbachia in pots with drainage holes and water them about once a week or when the top 1 to 2 inches of soil feels dry. After watering, pour out any excess water pooling in your plant saucers to keep plants from sitting in soggy soil.

Fertilizer

To ensure deffenbachia produces lots of

to half strength is perfect for these plants.

You can also feed them with slow-release fertilizers or fertilizer stakes—these products should be applied according to the application instructions on the fertilizer packaging.

Humidity

Dieffenbachia loves extra humidity, and they thrive when humidity levels are at 60% or higher. However, dieffenbachia isn't as fussy about humidity as some tropical houseplants, and they usually get by at average indoor humidity levels. If your plant's leaves turn brown and crispy at the edges, group your houseplants closer together and add a humidifier or pebble tray to raise humidity!

Seasonal Care

As with other houseplants, dieffenbachia grow more slowly during winter and don't need as much water or fertilizer. These plants should also be protected from

can cause dieffenbachia to drop
their leaves.

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Throughout the year, remove yellow or damaged leaves as needed with sterilized scissors, and always wash your hands thoroughly when you're done. Over time, dieffenbachia plants will naturally lose their lower leaves and develop sparsely leafed canes. When this occurs, cut the plant's stem back to about 1 foot, allow the rooted stem section to grow new leaves, and save the top section of the stem for propagation!



Dieffenbachia cutting repotted.
Credit: Giedre Vaitekune

Dieffenbachia Propagation

There are many ways to propagate dumb cane: from stem cuttings, root division, or entire stem sections. For best results, propagate dieffenbachia in spring, and remember to wear your gardening gloves!

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and let the cutting dry overnight. Dip the cut stem end in water and rooting hormone, and plant it horizontally or vertically in individual pots filled with damp potting mix. Place the cutting in bright indirect light, and water regularly to keep the soil moist. Repot the cutting (if needed) once roots form.

- **To divide dieffenbachia roots,** wait until your plant produces an offshoot with several leaves and a healthy nest of roots. Then, use sterilized pruners to clip the offshoot off the parent plant and plant it in its own pot!
- **To propagate larger stem sections,** save the upper portion of dieffenbachia plants after pruning and remove the lower leaves. Let the stem dry overnight, dip the cut stem end in water and rooting hormone, and plant it in a pot filled with damp potting mix. Place the cutting in bright, indirect light, water regularly, and wait for roots to sprout.

Types



Dieffenbachia (Dumb Cane) 'Camille'

- **'Camille':** One of the most common types of dieffenbachia, 'Camille' has large oval leaves with creamy white leaf centers marked with dark green at the edges. Grows up to 2 to 3 feet tall and 2 feet wide.
- **'Sarah':** With freckled yellow and green leaves, 'Sarah' has a whimsical look and a relatively bushy growth habit. Grows to 2.5 feet tall.
- **'Snow':** A large, dramatic-looking dieffenbachia, the green and cream leaves are striped like a tiger's fur! Grows 6 feet or taller with large leaves up to 12 inches long.

GARDENING PRODUCTS



PESTS/DISEASES

In general, indoor dieffenbachia are pest- and disease-free. But if you notice drooping leaves or other signs of stress, there are a few common culprits.

- **Pests**, like spider mites, whiteflies, and scale, will sometimes target dieffenbachia plants. Treat these pests with weekly applications of organic soap or neem oil spray when the sun isn't shining.
- **Yellowing or browning leaves** are usually caused by watering issues, but

splotches on its leaves and the soil feels soggy, investigate the roots for signs of rot.

- **Drooping leaves and stems** can result from too much or too little sun, but they can also occur if dieffenbachia plants get too cold or they don't receive enough water. Assess your plant's growing environment to pinpoint the cause!

WIT AND WISDOM

- Dieffenbachia belongs to the Araceae plant family, which includes other popular houseplants like peace lilies and flamingo flowers. These plants are also related to skunk cabbages, although they don't emit skunky smells!
- According to traditional lore, dieffenbachia plants are associated with protection and can be used symbolically to ward against the evil eye.
- These plants are named after Joseph Dieffenbach, the head gardener of the

person to bring Dieffenbachia plants

from Brazil to Europe in the 1830s.

- The nickname “dumb cane” comes from the fact that the plant’s sap is poisonous. Chewing the stem or leaves could cause mouth swelling and loss of speech, rendering one “dumb” (so don’t do that!).

HOUSEPLANT GUIDES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lauren Landers



Lauren is a gardener, writer, and public speaker with over a decade of experience helping others learn about gardening, homesteading, and sustainable living. [Read More from Lauren Landers](#)

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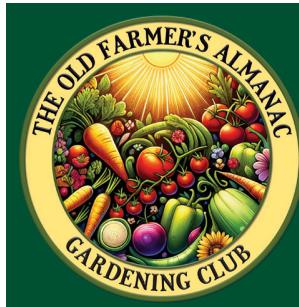
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COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

Janize (not verified) 1 month 2 weeks ago

My transplanted diff large older leaves r turning yellow!

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I have them in a porous pot n only water when top inch is dry. Its in my spare bath. I mist the leaves twice a week. I fertilzed with osmocote sliw release. What am i doing wrong please.

REPLY

Joe Bills 1 month 2 weeks ago

Hi Janize,

If I am understanding your question correctly, you have recently repotted your dieffenbachia, but it is back in the same location it was prior to re-

plant is indeed back in its old location, we can probably eliminate too much sun as a suspect. That leaves us with water (too much or too little) or transplant shock. It seems you've had dieffenbachia for a while and probably have pretty good intuition on their watering. It could be that the new pot isn't draining properly, or if the pot is big, that too much water is bypassing the roots. But given your scenario, I suspect that the most cause of your yellowing leaves is transplant shock. The University of Connecticut offers up some solid care tips for dieffenbachia:

<https://homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu/factsheets/dieffenbachia/>, and

Missouri University Extension service put out a handy video that explores transplant stress and shock in both indoor and outdoor plants:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsOIoWWa4Hs>.

I hope this is helpful, and that your

All best,

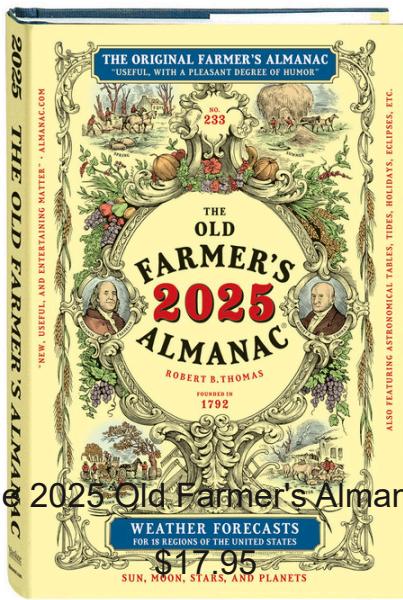
Joe Bills

Associate Editor

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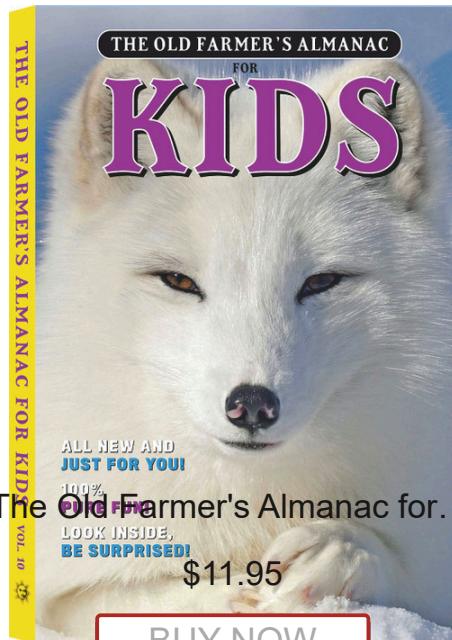
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