

The Corn Plant Guide

Dracaena fragrans



How to use this guide

The weight of the pot. The width of the newest leaves. The depth of the dry layer. The condition of the leaf tips. Good care begins by noticing what changed before deciding what to do.

THE ONE-CHANGE RULE

Change one condition.
Record what happened. Give
the plant time to answer.

Contents

PLANT IDENTITY	
BOTANICAL	<i>Dracaena fragrans</i>
FAMILY	Asparagaceae
ORIGIN	Tropical Africa
HABIT	Slow-growing evergreen shrub

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Start with the condition you can observe. Avoid making several changes at once.
The printable log at the end is part of the care system, not an afterthought.



Plant profile

Dracaena fragrans is a slow-growing evergreen shrub with tan, woody canes and spirally arranged rosettes of strap-like leaves. The familiar 'Massangeana' form carries a broad yellowish-lime center stripe; other cultivars vary in color and width.

Care at a glance

Moderate filtered light, steady warmth, free drainage, and fewer winter waterings. Consistency matters more than a rigid routine.

LIGHT

Give it bright to moderate filtered light. Protect the leaves from strong direct sun, which can scorch them.

WATER

Keep the mix lightly moist during active growth without leaving it saturated. Let the surface dry slightly, and reduce watering in winter.

HUMIDITY

Moderate household humidity can work. A room humidifier may help where leaf tips repeatedly brown in dry air.

WARMTH

Aim for 70-80°F (21-27°C), keep it above 50°F (10°C), and protect it from drafts and abrupt temperature changes.

SOIL

Use a commercial indoor potting mix in a stable container with unobstructed drainage holes. Never leave the pot standing in water.

UPKEEP

Inspect for thrips and mealybugs. Wipe dusty leaves gently.

THE RELIABLE DEFAULT

Choose moderate filtered light. Keep the mix lightly moist during active growth, then lengthen the interval as winter growth slows.

Light

Window direction is only the beginning. Trees, buildings, season, curtains, and distance all change the light that reaches a leaf.

TOO INTENSE

Bleached or tan patches on the window-facing surface after abrupt exposure to stronger sun.

USEFUL RANGE

Bright to moderate filtered daylight supports broad leaves, visible striping, and balanced rosettes.

TOO DIM

Narrower new leaves, weaker color, pronounced leaning, or stalled growth during the active season.

ADJUST SLOWLY

Move the plant in stages. Sudden changes can burn or stress established leaves.

TURN WITH INTENTION

Leaf rosettes can lean toward a window. Rotate only a small amount at a time, then leave the plant long enough to acclimate.



Placement

Choose bright to moderate filtered light where the long leaves have room to arch. Keep the plant away from cold glass, drafts, heating vents, and frequent traffic.

Watering

During active growth, keep the root zone lightly moist rather than continuously wet. In winter, slower growth usually means a longer interval.



Feel just below the surface before watering. If the upper mix is still moist, wait.

01

CHECK THE MIX

Feel just below the surface and compare the pot's weight. If the upper mix is still evenly moist, wait.

02

WATER EVENLY

When the surface begins to dry, wet the root zone evenly until water exits the drainage holes.

03

LET IT FINISH

Let the pot drain completely, then empty the saucer or decorative outer pot.

Humidity and temperature

Moderate humidity, stable air, and thoughtful water quality help preserve the long leaves and their fine tips.

WARM ROOMS

Aim for 70-80°F (21-27°C), and keep the plant above 50°F (10°C). Protect it from cold glass, hot vents, and abrupt temperature swings.

HUMIDITY

Moderate humidity is useful. A room humidifier is more reliable than repeatedly wetting the foliage.

WINTER

Shorter days slow growth and water use. Check the mix rather than maintaining the same summer watering interval.

SEPARATE AIR FROM SOIL

Humidity may help dry tips, but it does not justify saturated soil or replace a review of water quality.

Soil and fertilizer



The mix sits below the rim around the woody canes, leaving space for even watering.

POTTING MIX

Choose a commercial indoor potting mix that drains freely. Avoid dense garden soil, oversized pots, and sealed decorative containers without a draining inner pot.

FERTILIZER

Feed during active spring and summer growth at or below the labeled rate. Periodically flush the mix to limit accumulated fertilizer salts, then pause feeding when growth slows.

Corn Plant anatomy



Numbered markers correspond to the definitions at right.

① LEAF BLADE

The simple, glossy, strap-like photosynthetic surface.

② CENTER STRIPE

The yellowish-lime central band characteristic of the 'Massangeana' cultivar.

③ MIDRIB

The prominent central vein running the length of each leaf.

④ SHEATHING LEAF BASE

The stalkless, clasping base that attaches the leaf directly to the cane.

⑤ LEAF ROSETTE

The crowded spiral of leaves carried at the top of an active cane.

⑥ CANE AND LEAF SCAR

The woody stem and ring-like traces left by older leaves.

Leaf and cane care



READ THE WHOLE ROSETTE

One damaged tip is weak evidence. Look for a repeated pattern across older leaves and the newest central growth.

CLEAN GENTLY

Support each long blade as you wipe it with a barely damp soft cloth. Avoid oils, leaf polish, and hard rubbing.

PRUNE DELIBERATELY

Remove a fully failed leaf close to the cane without cutting the growing rosette. Use clean tools for any cane cut.

WATCH THE NEXT LEAVES

Judge recovery by healthy new growth. Existing scars and brown tips will not turn green again.

ABOUT BROWN TIPS

Dry air can contribute, but fluoride, accumulated salts, and watering swings can also damage tips. Review the pattern and recent care before choosing a response.

Troubleshooting

Check the pattern, the root zone, and the recent change before reaching for a remedy.

WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT TO INSPECT	FIRST RESPONSE
Brown leaf tips	Dry air, fluoridated water, accumulated salts, watering swings, or exposure to a vent.	Review water quality, flush accumulated salts, and stabilize the environment.
Bleached or tan patches	Strong direct sun, hot glass, or a rapid move into brighter light.	Filter the strongest light and judge recovery by undamaged new leaves.
Yellowing with a soft cane	Persistently wet mix, blocked drainage, root condition, odor, or cold exposure.	Pause watering and inspect the drainage and root zone before changing anything else.
Narrower new leaves	Very low light, one-sided exposure, or a seasonal slowdown.	Improve filtered light gradually and evaluate only the next leaves.
Speckling or pests	Leaf folds and bases for thrips, silvery scars, black specks, or cottony mealybugs.	Separate the plant, confirm the pest, and follow a labeled treatment.

DO NOT STACK REMEDIES

Extra water, fertilizer, repotting, homemade pesticide, and a new location applied together can increase stress and erase the evidence. Change one condition at a time unless roots are actively failing.

Repotting



Healthy roots are firm and pale to tan; soft, dark, or foul-smelling tissue requires closer inspection.

01

PREPARE

Choose a draining pot one size larger and prepare fresh mix.

02

INSPECT

Look before teasing. Healthy roots are firm and pale or tan rather than soft, dark, and foul-smelling.

03

SET

Keep the trunk at its former depth. Do not bury the woody stem to correct a lean.

04

SETTLE

Backfill gently, water to settle the mix, then let the pot drain completely.

WHEN TO ACT

Repot when roots are crowded, the plant becomes unstable, or the mix no longer drains normally. Choose a stable pot only slightly wider than the root mass.

Propagation

A Corn Plant cane can be divided into short sections. Each section needs nodes, and an upright cutting must retain its original orientation.



A short cane section with at least two nodes may be rooted upright or laid horizontally with its upper half exposed.

01

CHOOSE

Choose a healthy cane and mark which end was originally uppermost before making any cuts.

02

DIVIDE

Cut the cane into 2-3 inch sections, each carrying at least two nodes.

03

SET

Keep an upright section in its original orientation, or lay it horizontally with about half the cane above the medium.

04

MAINTAIN

Keep warm in bright indirect light with even moisture and humidity, but ventilate and avoid stagnant, soggy medium.

TOP CUTTINGS

A leafy top section can also root if it includes viable cane tissue. Record the cut date and judge success by new roots or a new shoot rather than by unchanged leaf color.

Seasonal care

Indoor seasons are shaped by daylight, heating, cooling, and windows. The plant's pace remains the primary signal.

OBSERVE	SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	WINTER
LIGHT	Increase filtered light gradually.	Filter harsh midday sun.	Watch shorter days.	Use the brightest safe place.
WATER	Growth and drying may accelerate.	Recheck the upper mix often.	Intervals may widen.	Confirm dryness first.
FEED	Begin with growth.	Continue at label rate.	Reduce as growth slows.	Pause if inactive.
PROJECTS	Repot, prune, or take stem cuttings.	Inspect stems, leaf undersides, and drainage.	Clean leaves and review new growth.	Protect from cold glass.

THE USEFUL SCHEDULE

Schedule observations. Let the observations determine the care.

Pet safety

The ASPCA lists *Dracaena fragrans* as toxic to dogs and cats because it contains saponins.

PRACTICAL PRECAUTIONS

Place the plant where pets cannot chew the leaves or overturn its container.

Collect fallen leaves, pruned stems, fertilizer, and potting debris promptly.

Keep pets away from leaves, stems, roots, fallen material, and pruning debris.

Keep fertilizers, pesticides, and potting materials secured.

WHAT TO DO

Possible signs include vomiting, depression, loss of appetite, and drooling; cats may also develop dilated pupils. Contact a veterinarian or animal poison service promptly after suspected ingestion.

ASPCA ANIMAL POISON CONTROL

(888) 426-4435

A consultation fee may apply.

This guidance applies to correctly identified *Dracaena fragrans*. Keep the botanical name available when seeking veterinary advice.

Observation log: before a change

Use one page for one care decision. Print extra copies of pages 18-19 whenever you need them.

PLANT NAME OR IDENTIFYING NOTE

DATE

LOCATION AND WINDOW DIRECTION

WHAT I OBSERVED

POTTING MIX BEFORE WATERING

☐ Wet
 ☐ Moist
 ☐ Dry at surface
 ☐ Dry deeper
 ☐ Not checked

ONE ACTION I TOOK

Observation log: follow-up

Return after enough time has passed to notice a meaningful response. Avoid adding a second change too quickly.

FOLLOW-UP DATE

DAYS SINCE THE CHANGE

WHAT CHANGED NEXT

WHAT STAYED THE SAME

MY NEXT OBSERVATION DATE AND WHY

☐ Continue
 ☐ Reassess
 ☐ Seek expert help
 ☐ No further action

Continue observing

Keep the guide. Reprint the log. Let observation become the routine.