

Dieffenbachia

Description

Dieffenbachia is a genus of tropical plants in the Family Araceae noted for their patterned leaves. Members of this genus are popular as houseplants because of their tolerance to shade. The name commemorates Ernst Dieffenbach, a German physician.

The Dieffenbachia is considered a medium toxicity plant. The cells of the Dieffenbachia plant contain needle-shaped calcium oxalate crystals called raphides. If a leaf is chewed, these crystals cause a burning sensation in the mouth and throat; swelling can occur along with a temporary inability to speak, and (rarely) death. Chewing results in the swelling of the throat which can block the airway. Slaves were supposedly sometimes punished by having dieffenbachia put into their mouths. Young children (at the age where they regularly put things into their mouths) are at risk if they eat or chew on Dieffenbachia leaves. The sap in the plant is an irritant to many people.

Light

Medium indirect light. The plant needs light but filtered sunlight through a window is usually sufficient.

Watering

The plant needs moderately moist soil. Keep the soil slightly dry to the touch. Make sure the plant does not sit in water.

Fertilizer

Use Schultz houseplant food and follow the instructions on the label.

Potential Problems

Can get mealybug and spidermites. We recommend Ferti-lome Whitefly/Mealybug spray. This product is carried in our garden centers.

Keep the plant out of cold and hot drafts and try to keep the foliage from touching window panes and sliding doors, as extreme heat or cold can burn the plant. Temperatures below about 5° C (40° F) can kill the plant.

As the plant gets larger and older, it will drop foliage from the bottom of the plant. This is a normal process and no reason for concern.

Cultivars

Dieffenbachia amoena
Dieffenbachia maculata
Dieffenbachia seguine