

## Kiss My Aster

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### Desperate Houseplants

*Amanda Thomsen*



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I think most of us can relate to this: having a green thumb when you're outside gardening does NOT mean you have a green thumb with houseplants. Am I right? They're two totally different things. For me, the disparity drove me bonkers. So I quit my garden center gig and jumped in with both feet to become a territory manager for a large indoor plant rental company. I was committed to giving myself a crash course in indoor plant survival ... and thankfully it worked. I'm sitting here writing this surrounded by TWELVE indoor plants. And that's just what I have going in this room. I easily have 30 in the next room over.

Indoor plants are hot right now and there's a great market for them. But pretty much all of the customers have already suffered a staggering setback by the death of a Fiddle Leaf Fig and they're starting to look at silks! Oh no! How to get them back in the fold?

Try these tips:

- Make sure you write up your own plant care tags for each plant. Do not copy and paste off the Internet. For example, here in Chicago, air conditioning and forced-air heating are THE WORST for houseplants. So make sure you address that in writing. Sometimes I think we're as much in the business of managing expectations as we are in the plant-dealing business. Let them know what to expect.
- Don't merchandise in an adorable way, a chic way or according to size. Keep plants that have the same light and water needs together. If you have an indoor plant section, market the sansevieria with the jade and lucky bamboo right in front: this is your beginner section. As you move into the department, things become increasingly trickier, just like life. Have the ficus in the wayyyyyy back.
- Offer a help-line email address with each purchase. At the register, let customers know that a few photos and a conversation can fix things, and often times, even right a wrong.
- Let them know that if things are heading in the wrong direction, they can always bring in a leaf for examination. Let them know there's always help available and all the ways they can get it.
- Consistent, monthly houseplant classes that teach basics and troubleshooting. Show them how to sizzle scale with a Q-tip of rubbing alcohol. It's the stuff dreams/nightmares are made of.

- Be sure to have everything an indoor gardener needs. This includes: clear plastic trays, soil, extra pots for replanting and organic fertilizer. Also, systemic pesticides, leaf shine and ALL THE MACRAMÉ. (I'm a little stoked macramé is back in. Can you tell? I'm not sure why!)
- Facebook or Instagram Live segments about houseplants. Consider it a dare, from me to you.
- The key to allllll my personal houseplant success is very singular: I put nearly every houseplant I have outdoors for the summer. It's great for my plants, it gives my outdoor patio spaces instant glam in late spring and it makes my house look less cluttered all summer. I let customers know about this trick and mention that summer and autumn are great times to do heavy watering and fertilizing (so you aren't doing that stuff inside) and that, yeah, some insects are going to hitchhike in but that's just nature. When I talk to customers and say, "Okay, you're afraid to commit to caring for houseplants year-round ... so what if you only apply yourself to it for half the year?" That usually works!
- Offer home plant doctor visits.
- Mention MACRAMÉ IS BACK IN! **GP**

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*Amanda Thomsen is a gardening author and blogger. You can find her funky, punky blog planted at [www.kissmyaster.co](http://www.kissmyaster.co) and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.*