

## Growing Tropical Plants in a Sunspace

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It is surprisingly easy to grow tropical plants in a sunroom or window here in the mountains of Colorado. I have been doing it successfully for the past five years. My sunroom is not heated so I try to only buy plants that can survive for short periods in temperatures below 40 degrees.

Some of the easiest tropical plants to grow are schefflera, hibiscus, Easter, and Christmas cactus, terrestrial orchids, and passiflora or passion flower.

Scheffleras (*S. actinophylla*), or umbrella trees, are grown for the attractive patterns formed by their leaves and for their tall and shrubby form. Young plants have small leaves with only three to five leaflets, while older plants develop up to 12. Scheffleras prefer medium to bright light but will survive in minimal lighting. Keep plants away from heat vents, radiators, and open windows because drafts may damage plants. Water thoroughly, and then let the soil dry to ½ inch deep before watering again. It will grow to approximately eight feet but you can limit its size by hard pruning it back to two or three feet.

Hibiscuses come in many different colors from bright red to blue. They also do well as potted plants and thrive in a sheltered place outside in the summer. They like lots of sun and mine blooms every year.

Easter and Christmas cactuses are easy to come by. Most nurseries and grocery stores carry them. They are also easy to care for and produce flowers in winter or spring. The flowers come in many colors and shapes. These plants are quite happy in any window and survive with only occasional water and fertilizer.

Terrestrial orchids are another plant I have been thoroughly surprised with. They can be quite small or very large. They readily grow in pots and are very easy to maintain. They like some sunlight but aren't fussy. The blooms are generally quite spectacular. Mine blooms about every other year, usually about February. They do need some regular water but don't like to be waterlogged.

My favorite tropical is the passiflora. It also comes in many varieties and is a vine which gets about six feet long. It grows best if it has a trellis. Mine is purple and can withstand cold temperatures for a long time. I have a variety called a Maypop. It blooms in April about the time I am really looking forward to spring.

There are of course other tropical plants that are easy to care for and have interesting leaf shapes, colors, or flowers. I grew two Poinciana trees from seed. The tree is native to South Africa but has become naturalized in much of the tropical world. It looks like a cross between a mimosa and a locust with a flower like that of the mimosa. Mine are less than a year old but are doing well both inside and on the deck. Now, go find some tropicals to grow in your sunspace and you

will be amazed at how easy it is and how beautiful the greenery and the unusual flowers are to see when the snow is flying during winter.

For questions regarding produce, landscape, and horticulture questions; please contact the Teller County, Colorado Master Gardener grow line at 686-7980, visit our website at [www.co.teller.co.us/csu](http://www.co.teller.co.us/csu) or visit our booth at the Woodland Park farmers' market.