

How to Identify & Select House & Garden Plants

Plants bring life to any room, balcony or yard, but choosing the right ones for your condo or garden can be as challenging as any décor makeover. If you don't have access to a garden centre planner, it's difficult to be confident that your selections will create the desired ambience over the long term. Fortunately, there are several "plant identifier" apps that can help. Even if you don't know the name of a plant, you can take a picture and upload it to learn more about the species.

Not only can these apps help identify the foliage or blooms, some can also help you determine how well a plant might thrive in your preferred location, and what its growth potential will be from year to year. Before you make a purchase, you can go online to learn about the best soil mixture and watering regiment for that plant and get troubleshooting tips for disease or insect control. For outdoor plants, you can learn about your region's hardiness zone, and how the arrangements of plants affect each other, based on the nutrients they require, or the shade they may throw.



Owning a Rentable Vacation Property

Whether you currently own or wish to buy a vacation property, you probably recognize the usefulness of diversifying your real estate investments. Of course, there is also the pleasure of frequenting an enjoyable vacation region and being part of another community with local recreation and entertainment opportunities. Beyond personal enjoyment, you might also consider relying on the property for rental income to help pay for ongoing costs, such as a mortgage and maintenance. But, depending on the property's location, there could be specific municipal bylaws to consider regarding short-term rentals, such as requirements for permits, insurance, and possibly small-business registration and taxation.

Thankfully, there are many service organizations that can help make renting a successful venture (e.g. Airbnb, Vrbo, etc.). They provide tips and information on budgeting, property management, marketing and client screening to help ensure a smooth operation. As an alternative, condo owners who want to operate independently, can use available cloud-based subscription software to help keep track of a rental enterprise.

Single Room AC Options

There was a time when residential air-conditioning meant either a whole-home central system forcing treated air through a network of interior ducts, or a cumbersome window unit. There were few, if any, other choices available. But now there is a wide range of options available to keep individual rooms comfortable during hot weather, from personal desktop units to energy-efficient heat-pumps. The smaller battery-operated units are truly portable, with most relying on an ice-water reservoir and a powerful fan. But, thanks to sophisticated designs, they can be surprisingly effective for a specific area, such as an individual workspace or a bedside table.

Freestanding portable units can cool an entire room, with many compact models taking up floorspace similar to a dehumidifier. For true operational efficiency, consider a heat pump unit for selected rooms, as they have the added capacity of providing low-cost heat on colder days. However, they require a permanent interior wall installation and a hose/power connection through an exterior wall to an outside fan unit.

