



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## *Aspidistra elatior*<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Growing in large, leafy clumps, Cast Iron Plant is unsurpassable for dependable, dark green foliage in very low light conditions (Fig. 1). The glossy, coarse-textured leaves provide an excellent background for low flowering annuals or make effective mass plantings when allowed to spread by underground stems into a groundcover. It also makes a nice facer plant in front of a shrub border.

### General Information

**Scientific name:** *Aspidistra elatior*

**Pronunciation:** ass-pid-DISS-truh ee-LAY-tee-or

**Common name(s):** Cast Iron Plant, Aspidistra

**Family:** *Liliaceae*

**Plant type:** perennial; herbaceous

**USDA hardiness zones:** 7 through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 7:** year round

**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** container or above-ground planter; ground cover; suitable for growing indoors; accent; edging

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

### Description

**Height:** 1 to 2 feet

**Spread:** 1 to 2 feet



Figure 1. Cast Iron Plant.

**Plant habit:** upright

**Plant density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** coarse

### Foliage

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Leaf arrangement:** most emerge from the soil, usually without a stem

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** oblong

**Leaf venation:** parallel

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 18 to 36 inches

**Leaf color:** variegated

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** brown

**Flower characteristic:** flowers periodically throughout the year

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** no fruit

**Fruit length:** no fruit

**Fruit cover:** no fruit

**Fruit color:** not applicable

**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

**Current year stem/twig color:** not applicable

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** not applicable

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** plant grows in the shade

**Soil tolerances:** slightly alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Soil salt tolerances:** poor

**Plant spacing:** 12 to 18 inches

**Other**

**Roots:** not applicable

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Pest resistance:** no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

## **Use and Management**

Cast Iron Plant is tolerant of a wide range of soils, from very rich to very poor. The variegated version of this plant needs fairly poor soil to retain its coloration. While tolerant of low moisture conditions, Cast Iron Plant should be watered during periods of drought. Plant on 12 to 18-inch centers for quick ground cover effect.

Growing as far north as Raleigh, North Carolina, Cast Iron Plant should be sheltered from winter winds. In exposed locations, the leaves are very susceptible to winter burn, perhaps from the inadequate moisture conditions during the colder months. If desired, all the old foliage may be removed in spring to provide fresh growth each year.

The cultivar 'Variegata' has leaves alternately striped green and white in varied widths. Plants will tend to lose these stripes if planted in rich soil.

Propagation is by division of the matted clumps.

Very resistant to insect pests.

### **Pests and Diseases**

Cast Iron Plant is susceptible to leaf-spotting diseases.