Aspidistra elatior Cast Iron Plant[1]

Edward F. Gilman, Ryan W. Klein, and Gail Hansen[2]

Introduction

Growing in large, leafy clumps, cast iron plant is unsurpassable for dependable, dark green foliage in very lowlight conditions. 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.

Figure 1. Full form - *Aspidistra elatior*: cast iron plant
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

Figure 2. Leaf - *Aspidistra elatior*: cast iron plant
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

General Information

Scientific name: *Aspidistra elatior*

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

Common name(s): cast iron plant, aspidistra, barroom plant

Family: *Ruscaceae*

Plant type: perennial; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 7 through 11 (Figure 3)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

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Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: native to temperate Asia

Invasive potential: not considered a problem species at this time and may be recommended by UF/IFAS faculty (reassess in 10 years)

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

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

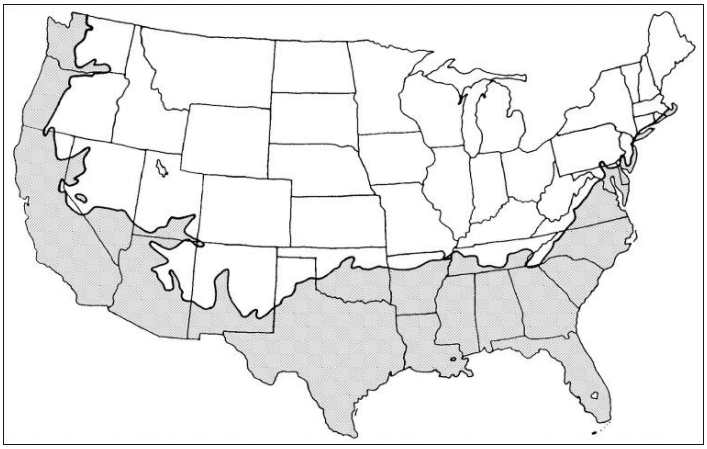

Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
Credits: undefined

Description

Height: 1 to 2 feet

Spread: 1 to 2 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: coarse

Foliage

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

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.

Pests and Diseases

Very resistant to insect pests.

Cast iron plant is susceptible to leaf-spotting diseases.