

How does your garden grow?

Wade Wheatley, assistant greenhouse horticulturist

No outdoor garden? No problem—you can still have a flourishing home garden.

Look to your indoor space, as Wade Wheatley, assistant greenhouse horticulturist for the Chicago Botanic Garden, does. However, when asked what advice he would give to people trying to grow plants in their own homes, he laughed and said, “Don’t do it like me. It’s a pain in the neck!”

Indeed, Wheatley definitely doesn’t take the easy, or some may even say, logical route. Rather than looking at his surroundings and figuring out what would grow best in his home, he takes a more challenging path.

Wheatley, who tends plants in the Garden’s Greenhouses, does a lot of reading, researching new and different plants for the Garden. “Sometimes I become obsessed with a certain plant” for my home garden, he said. “Then I hunt it down and find it.” He manipulates his environment to create an atmosphere where he can successfully grow his latest obsession, even if that means bringing in special lighting, heat mats, or terrariums.

His indoor garden is made up of about 40 percent orchids, 40 percent succulents, and 20 percent of what Wheatley puts in the “other” category. Many of his plants are endemic to South Africa, with names like *Gasteria*, *Haworthia*, *Anthurium*, and bromeliad. Due to a limited amount of space, he chooses smaller species for growing, and his plants tend to stay about 8 to 10 inches in height.

According to Wheatley, most people fail with indoor plants because of “inattention. You have to be on top of watering. Indoor pots dry out faster than plants outside.

“I like to say that houseplants talk to you, but you have to learn to listen to them, read the signals.”

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Can you water an orchid with ice cubes?

Horticulturist Wade Wheatley, who helps care for the Garden’s orchids, has the answer:

“Plants (both tropical and otherwise) should always be watered with water that is the same temperature as the ambient air temperature,” he said. “Rain is always roughly the same temperature as the air, so plants evolved for that. Watering a houseplant with ice means that there’s roughly a 40-degree temperature difference between the water and the air. Cold water will shock the plant, putting it under unnecessary stress. Just use room temperature or lukewarm water.”

More on orchids and the Orchid Show, page 8

