

Pothos



Pothos is a common house-plant.

Pothos, also sometimes called devil's ivy, golden pothos, or hunter's rove, is one of the most popular house plants in North America. The scientific name is either *Epipremnum pinnatum* cv. 'Aureum' or *E. aureum*. However, there are a lot of characters on which *E. pinnatum* and 'Aureum' differ, so the latter may be more valid. In the past it has been classified under several different names including *Pothos aureus*, *Rahphidophora aurea*, *R. pinnata*, and *Scindapsus aureus*. This genus of about 15 species in the arum family (Araceae) occurs from Southeast Asia to the western Pacific. All are evergreen climbers with very different juvenile and mature foliage. In tropical regions pothos is grown as a ground cover or as a scrambler up trees. In our area it can be planted in hanging baskets, used as an underplanting for large potted plants or trees, or grown indoors as a pot plant or trained up a sphagnum pole. It is very efficient at removing indoor pollutants such as formaldehyde, xylene, and benzene.

E. pinnatum is a liana found from Southeast Asia to New Guinea and in northern Queensland, Australia. 'Aureum' is alleged to have originated in the Solomon Islands, but appears never to have been collected in the wild so it may actually have been a horticultural selection. This evergreen root-climber has a slender twining and branching stem that grows up to 65 feet long. The glossy, heart-shaped, waxy leaves are bright green or are irregularly splotched or marbled with yellow or cream. The juvenile leaves are entire (no indentations or holes) and up to several inches long, while the mature phase has oval-to heart-shaped, pinnate leaves up to 3 feet long with holes along the midrib.



The leaves of pothos grow much bigger as they mature.



Variegated pothos covering a wall in Mexico.

As a juvenile it forms modest terrestrial colonies, but the leaves grow larger as they get higher in the canopy. Plants also produce adhesive aerial roots as they climb into the canopy, with clasping roots arising from nodes and internodes, and prolific feeding roots. The leaf stalks have a "knee" and sheathe the stem at the base. This species is only hardy in zones 10-12, so is always grown as a houseplant or seasonal annual in our area.

Pothos does not flower in cultivation, since only the juvenile phase is grown as a houseplant, and flowering occurs only in the mature phase. In the wild, these plants produce a number of erect flower stalks together, each with a cream spathe marked with purple surrounding the spadix.

Pothos is available from many retail sources in a variety of sizes from small starter plants to large hanging baskets. They are sometimes also offered growing on wood or foam poles in different container sizes.

Pothos is very easy to grow, so is an excellent choice for the beginner. It does best in filtered light, with high humidity, and temperatures between 70 and 90°F, but will survive a wide range of environmental conditions, but does not tolerate much direct sunlight. Keep out of drafts. The growing medium should be well aerated. Plants should be allowed to dry out slightly and watered only when the soil surface feels dry. Fertilize every other month, except during the winter when the plant is not actively growing. Older leaves will turn yellow and drop off naturally, eventually ending up with most of the leaves at the end of the vine. Selectively prune to keep vines a reasonable length and to promote new growth. Plants can be cut back to 2 inches from the soil line if necessary.



Pothos is grown as a ground cover in tropical climates.

This plant is easily propagated from cuttings or by air-layering. The vines root in water or vermiculite within 3-4 weeks and buds can start to grow in 1-2 weeks under warm temperatures. It is best to plant several rooted cuttings together in a single pot.



Pothos is easy to grow as a houseplant

Pothos generally has few pest problems, but is occasionally affected by some insects or diseases. Root rots, with symptoms of brown or nonexistent roots, are commonly promoted by overwatering. Blackening of the leaf margins or tips can be caused by overwatering, inadequate watering, or excess fertilizer (because of buildup of salts in the soil). Discoloration is often accompanied by leaves becoming yellow. The most common insect pests infesting pothos in homes are mealybugs and scales. Mealybugs appear as white, cottony masses, frequently in the leaf axils, on the lower surfaces of leaves and even on the roots. Scales look like ark-colored bumps on the stems and leaves and are sometimes difficult to distinguish from the plant material on which they are feeding. These pests may produce copious amounts of honeydew (many, but not all scales do), so the leaves and nearby surfaces may be sticky and sooty mold may develop. Infested plants become stunted, and with

severe infestations, plant parts begin to die. Pesticides may be used to control these insects, but often it is better to discard the plant and start over with clean plants or cuttings. Spider mites occasionally infest pothos and can easily be controlled with thorough cleaning and frequent applications of insecticidal soap.

Low light can result in loss of variegation. Low temperatures or abrupt change from very high temperatures to moderate temperatures can cause scattered brown patches, usually located in the center of the leaf, especially if plants are succulent and growing vigorously.

Pothos is toxic if ingested in large quantities because it contains calcium oxalate. This will cause burning in the mouth and the sap may also be irritating to the skin.



'Marble Queen' pothos.

There are several cultivars with various amounts of variegation, including:

- 'Golden Pothos' has golden, yellow-green variegated leaves.
- 'Jade' is a solid dark green type which does well in low light areas.
- "Lime" has bright yellow-green leaves.
- 'Marble Queen' has stems and moss green leaves streaked with white.
- 'Neon' has all yellow leaves.
- 'Tricolor' the off-white stems and leaves are variegated with white.



'Lime' pothos.

– Susan Mahr, University of Wisconsin - Madison

Additional Information:

- *Epipremnum aureum* – University of Florida Extension Fact Sheet FPS-194 at hort.ifas.ufl.edu/database/documents/pdf/shrub_fact_sheets/epiaura.pdf
- *Epipremnum aureum* – on the Missouri Botanic Garden's Kemper Center for Home Gardening website at www.mobot.org/gardeninghelp/plantfinder/Plant.asp?code=B594