

THE LOVELIEST SPRING NATIVE WILDFLOWER

by Carol Ann Harlos

The loveliest of all wildflowers, *Mertensia virginica*, has emerged in partial to full shade in woods or in gardens. The buds of Virginia bluebell will unfold and the bright green plant stems will grow from one to two feet. The bell-shaped flowers are pinkish-blue and as they age they gradually turn pink. Self fertilization is rare due to the flower structure. Nectar sipping butterflies are the most common pollinators. Each flower can produce up to four seeds.

This native species is common throughout the eastern half of North America, although they grow easily almost anywhere. This member of the Boraginaceae family and a relative of borage, comfrey, heliotrope, Brunnera (false forget-me-not), Pulmonaria (lungwort), Viper's Bugloss, and Forget-Me-Nots is a spring ephemeral. This means that after blooming is complete the plant disappears until next year. It spreads by seeds, so gradually a colony of plants appears. Gardeners can also propagate Virginia bluebells by dividing the rhizomes. The other good news is that Virginia bluebells are not usually favored by deer or rabbits.



photo by Carol Ann Harlos

POTHOS *Epipremnum aureum*

by Lisa Marie Gee

Pothos is a native plant of the island of Mo'orea in French Polynesia. It is naturalized in many other tropical and subtropical forests in Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Pacific islands. In some areas it is considered an invasive. It is hardy in USDA zones 10 and 11 and will grow in shade to partial shade outside. Pothos is an easy to grow houseplant that doesn't require a lot of sunlight. This makes it a great plant for the house, office or dorm rooms as it can survive with fluorescent lighting or bright indirect light from outside.

Pothos is a long growing leafy vine. In the tropical jungles it can reach 70 feet in length. Indoors it can reach up to 30 feet. Pothos trails so it can be trained onto supports. It will not trellis itself. The leaves are heart shaped and can be green or variegated with white, yellow or pale green depending on the variety.

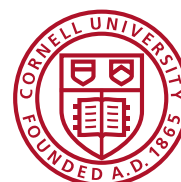
Pothos needs ordinary well-draining potting soil with a slightly acidic pH. When it becomes pot bound it can be repotted in a container 1-2 sizes larger in fresh potting soil. Leaves droop when it needs water. The soil should dry out between the waterings so the roots don't decay. One can fertilize every three months but this is often not necessary. Cut back plant stems to keep foliage full. If stems grow bare cut them back to soil level to rejuvenate the plant. Pothos can be propagated by stem cuttings placed in water or soil. If rooted in water transplant as soon as possible into soil to produce stronger roots.

There are usually no pests on this plant

with the exception of mealybugs. If this occurs use insecticidal soap or dab each one with rubbing alcohol, soaked on a cotton swab.

All parts of this plant are toxic. When ingested pothos can cause irritation and vomiting as it contains calcium oxalates. In sensitive people the sap can cause a rash. Keep your pets away!

Try pothos as an easy houseplant that you can almost neglect and still have success. Recommended cultivars are 'Marble Queen', 'Pearls and Jade', 'Neon' and 'Silver Satin'.



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