

Plants That Stimulate the Sense of Touch

Plants attract us to touch them through various sensory and aesthetic features that engage our curiosity and desire for interaction. Here are some ways this attraction is created:

- ✓ **Textures:** Many plants feature interesting and varied textures—such as the softness of lamb's ear, the smoothness of a succulent, or the roughness of tree bark—that invite exploration and touch. Textures can evoke curiosity and a desire to feel them.
- ✓ **Fragrance:** Aromatic plants, like herbs (e.g., mint, rosemary), release pleasant scents when touched or crushed. The appealing aromas can draw people closer to the plant, encouraging us to touch to experience the fragrance more fully.
- ✓ **Color and Visual Appeal:** Brightly colored flowers and vibrant foliage catch the eye and attract attention. This visual stimulation can lead to the impulse to engage with the plant physically.
- ✓ **Movement:** Some plants, like *Mimosa pudica* (sensitive plant), respond to touch by moving or folding their leaves. This fascinating characteristic can intrigue people and prompt further interaction.
- ✓ **Form and Structure:** Unique shapes and forms, such as spirals in succulents or the intricate layout of leaves, can create a desire to explore via touch. Curved or inviting forms suggest a welcoming invitation to engage.
- ✓ **Emotional Association:** Certain plants, like roses or lavender, may carry emotional or cultural significance that invites people to touch them due to fond memories or symbolic meanings.
- ✓ **Tactile Rewards:** The experiential benefits of touching plants, such as the soothing qualities of soft leaves or the coolness of a succulent, can make the act of touching pleasurable and rewarding.
- ✓ **Garden Design and Arrangement:** In well-designed gardens, the placement of plants can create pathways and spaces that encourage interaction. A garden layout can lead visitors to touch and engage with various plants.

Examples of Fun-to-Touch Plants

Here are some examples of plants that invite touch:



FUZZY LEAVES



LAMB'S EAR (STACHYS BYZANTINA)

Soft, velvety leaves that are highly tactile and often used in ornamental gardens.



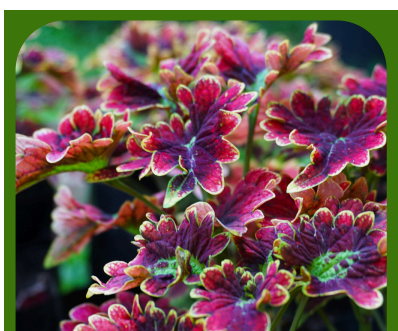
AFRICAN VIOLET (SAINTPAULIA)

Fuzzy leaves and vibrant flowers, popular for indoor gardening.



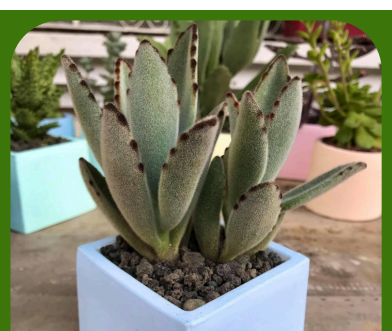
DUSTY MILLER (SENECIO CINERARIA)

Silvery, fuzzy leaves, often used in ornamental beds and borders.



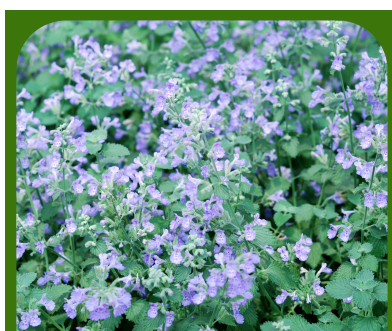
COLEUS (SOLENOSTEMON SCUTELLARIOIDES)

Various varieties with fuzzy leaves and striking colors and patterns.



PANDA PLANT (KALANCHOE TOMENTOSA)

Leaves resemble a fuzzy panda paw. Low-maintenance indoor plant.



CATMINT (NEPETA SPP.)

Soft, fuzzy leaves and aromatic qualities, often used in gardens.





SAGE (SALVIA OFFICINALIS)

Slightly fuzzy leaves with a characteristic aroma, used in cooking and herb gardens.



STONECROP (SEDUM SPP.)

Some varieties have thick, fleshy, fuzzy leaves, adding texture to rock gardens.



HOREHOUND (MARRUBIUM VULGARE)

Soft, fuzzy leaves, traditionally used for medicinal purposes.



PERILLA (PERILLA FRUTESCENS)

Fuzzy leaves with a unique flavor used in culinary applications.



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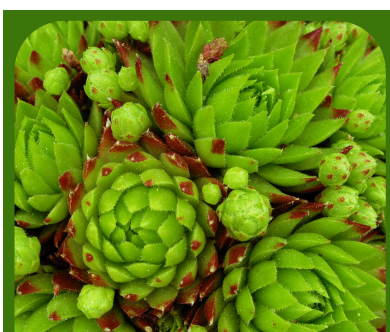


SUCCULENTS



ALOE VERA
(*ALOE BARBADENSIS*)

Smooth, fleshy leaves that are soothing when applied to the skin.



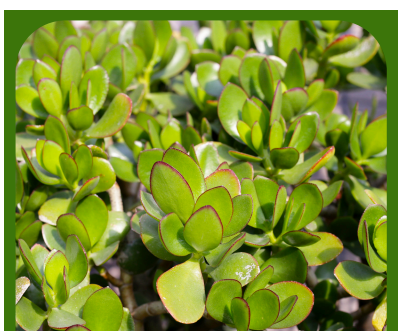
HENS AND CHICKS
(*SEMPERVIVUM*)

Rosette-forming succulents with plump leaves that are safe and enjoyable to touch.



PADDLE PLANT (KALANCHOE THYRSIFLORA)

Flat, paddle-shaped leaves that are soft and inviting to touch.



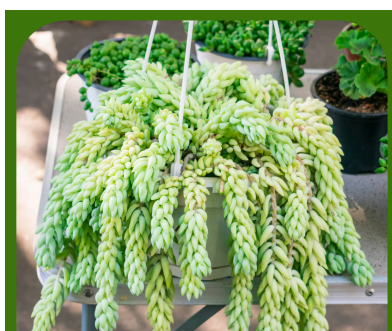
JADE PLANT
(*CRASSULA OVATA*)

Thick, round leaves that are smooth and glossy, providing a pleasant tactile experience.



STRING OF HEARTS
(*CEROPEGIA WOODII*)

Heart-shaped leaves that are small and delicate, making them fun to touch.



BURRO'S TAIL (SEDUM MORGANIANUM)

Cascading stems covered in plump, fuzzy leaves that are safe to touch and visually stunning.





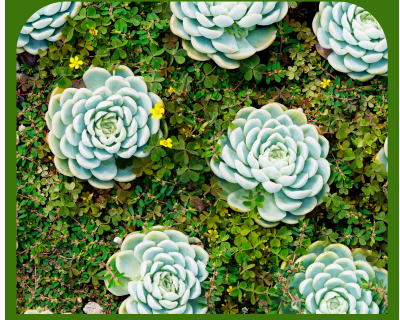
**GHOST PLANT (GRAPTOPETALUM
PARAGUAYENSE)**

Soft, pastel-colored leaves that are fun and safe to touch.



**ZEBRA PLANT (HAWORTHIA
FASCIATA)**

Thick, fleshy leaves with distinct white stripes, safe to handle.



**ECHEVERIA
(VARIOUS SPECIES)**

Many varieties with smooth, fleshy leaves that feel nice to touch.



**PORK AND BEANS (SEDUM
RUBROTINCTUM)**

Small, bean-like leaves that are fun to handle and have a unique appearance.



Examples of Fun-to-Touch Plants

Here are some examples of plants that invite touch:



MOSS (VARIOUS SPECIES)



SHEET MOSS
(HYPNUM SPP.)

This soft, velvety moss has a dense mat-like appearance and feels pleasant to the touch, making it ideal for decorative use in gardens or terrariums.



SPHAGNUM MOSS
(SPHAGNUM SPP.)

Known for its spongy texture, sphagnum moss is soft and lightweight. It's often used in crafts and gardening, as well as for potting plants due to its moisture-retaining qualities.



CUSHION MOSS (LEUCOBRYUM GLAUCUM)

This moss forms dense, cushion-like clumps that are fun to touch and soft underfoot. It is often used in gardens and landscapes.



REINDEER MOSS (CLADONIA RANGIFERINA)

Although technically a lichen, this moss has a unique, fuzzy appearance and a soft, spongy texture that makes it fun to handle.



POLYTRICHUM MOSS
(POLYTRICHUM SPP.)

Known for its tall, upright growth and thick, hair-like leaves, this moss has a distinctive texture that is engaging to touch.



MNIUM MOSS
(MNIUM HORNUM)

This moss has a velvety feel and is often found in woodlands, providing a cushiony texture that's enjoyable to touch.

Examples of Fun-to-Touch Plants

Here are some examples of plants that invite touch:



FRAGRANT PLANTS



LAVENDER
(LAVANDULA SPP.)

The aromatic qualities of lavender are calming and inviting, making people want to brush their hands through the leaves.



ROSEMARY (ROSMARINUS
OFFICINALIS)

This herb has a strong, savory scent that can be invigorating and prompts people to touch its needle-like leaves.



MINT (
MENTHA SPP.)

The fresh and cooling fragrance of mint invites people to crush the leaves and enjoy the delightful aroma.



SAGE
(SALVIA OFFICINALIS)

Known for its earthy aroma, touching sage leaves releases its fragrance, adding to the sensory experience.



THYME
(THYMUS SPP.)

The small, aromatic leaves of thyme emit a lovely scent when touched, encouraging interaction.



BASIL
(OCIMUM BASILICUM)

The sweet and peppery fragrance of basil's leaves makes it tempting to touch and smell them, especially in culinary contexts.





JASMINE
(*JASMINUM* SPP.)

The intense, sweet scent of jasmine flowers invites people to touch and appreciate their delicate beauty.



FENNEL (*FOENICULUM* VULGARE)

The strong, anise-like scent of fennel leaves makes them enjoyable to touch and smell.



GERANIUMS
(*PELARGONIUM* SPP.)

Many geranium varieties, especially scented ones, release pleasant fragrances that encourage people to engage with their leaves and flowers.



LEMON BALM (*MELISSA* OFFICINALIS)

The citrusy scent of lemon balm leaves is refreshing and often invites touching and crushing to release more aroma.



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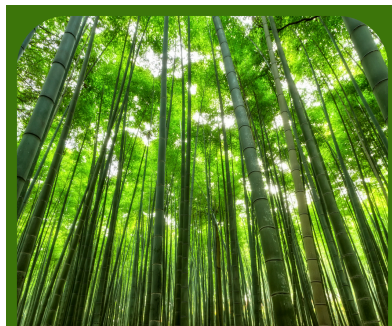


SMOOTH PLANTS



ALOE VERA
(ALOE BARBADENSIS)

Thick, fleshy, smooth leaves with soothing properties.



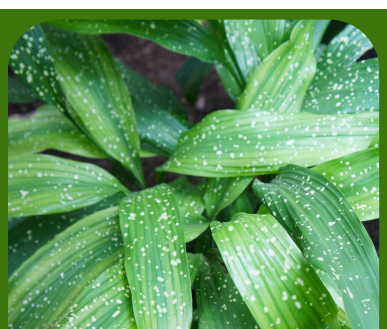
BAMBOO
(BAMBUSOIDEAE)

Slick, smooth surface of bamboo stalks.



CACTUS FLOWER
(VARIOUS SPECIES)

Smooth flowers, surprising for cacti.



CAST IRON PLANT
(ASPIDISTRA ELATIOR)

Sturdy, smooth leaves resistant to neglect.



CHINESE MONEY PLANT
(PILEA PEPEROMIODES)

Round, flat, smooth leaves.



CORKSCREW RUSH
(JUNCUS SPIRALIS)

Unique, twisty, spiral-shaped, hollow stems with smooth texture.



JADE PLANT
(*CRASSULA OVATA*)

Thick, rounded leaves with a smooth, glossy texture.



PEACE LILY
(*SPATHIPHYLLUM SPP.*)

Broad, smooth leaves, enhancing indoor aesthetics.



POTHOS
(*EPIPREMNUM AUREUM*)

Heart-shaped smooth leaves. They also grow in a trailing fashion, encouraging interaction.



RUBBER PLANT (FICUS ELASTICA)

Large, glossy leaves that are smooth to touch.



SNAKE PLANT
(*SANSEVIERIA*)

Smooth, glossy leaves.



ROSE
(*ROSA SPP.*)

The softness and smoothness of rose petals is second to none! Combined with the thorns on stems (caution!) provides a complex tactile experience when handled.



ZZ PLANT
(*ZAMIOCULCAS ZAMIIFOLIA*)

Shiny, waxy leaves with a smooth texture.

Examples of Fun-to-Touch Plants

Here are some examples of plants that invite touch:



PLANTS THAT ARE CRISPY/DRY TO THE TOUCH



GLOBE AMARANTH
(GOMPHRENA)

Distinctive 'gum ball' shaped blooms that are papery to the touch and excellent dried.



DRUMSTICKS
(CRASPEDIA)

Known for their distinctive, round, bright yellow flower heads that resemble small, fluffy spheres.



SILVER DOLLAR PLANT
(LUNARIA)

Lunaria has leaves that are green and slightly hairy. The most distinctive feature of Lunaria is its translucent, circular seed pods that resemble coins.



PAPER DAISY (XEROCHRYSUM
BRACTEATUM)

Related to strawflowers, they feature stiff, straw-like blooms that are often used for dried arrangements.



STATICE

Produces clusters of small, papery flowers that come in various colors, including purple, blue, yellow, pink, and white



STRAWFLOWER
(HELICHRYSUM BRACTEATUM)

Well known for its papery, crispy petals that retain their shape and color when dried.

Plants That Stimulate the Sense of Touch



Some plants may be harmful if touched because of various compounds in their leaves, stems, blooms, or roots. It's important to research all plants that will be used in TH programming to determine whether they have any toxicity factors that could harm participants.



Research each plant that is/will be present in your TH programming areas (indoors and outdoors) to determine toxicity levels, methods of exposure, what to do if exposure occurs, and whether the risk of toxin exposure is more or less likely to occur based on factors such as participant age, behavioral traits, intellectual/cognitive ability, psychological state, setting, etc.

Here's a list of common skin reactions that can occur when touching plants:



Contact Dermatitis: A localized rash or irritation that occurs after the skin comes into contact with certain plants, often due to allergens in plant sap or oils (common with plants like poison ivy and sumac).



Irritant Dermatitis: A red, inflamed rash that occurs from irritation due to rough plant surfaces or chemicals; can be caused by plants like nettles or certain cacti.



Allergic Reactions: Symptoms such as redness, swelling, and itching that result from an allergic response to certain plant proteins or saps (e.g., with roses, chrysanthemums, or certain types of ferns).



Burning Sensation: A stinging or burning feeling on the skin after contact with specific plants, commonly due to irritating compounds (found in plants like stinging nettle).



Hives (Urticaria): Raised, itchy welts that can develop after direct contact with certain plants known to cause allergic reactions.



Blisters: Small fluid-filled sacs that may form as a result of severe irritation or allergic reactions, often seen after contact with plants like poison ivy.



Redness and Inflammation: General redness and swelling that can occur after touching any irritant plant, indicating local inflammation.



Dryness and Peeling: Some plants may cause the skin to become dry and flaky, often due to harsh saps or oils that strip moisture from the skin.



Erythema: Increased redness of the skin resulting from irritation or allergic reactions after touching plants.



Common compounds or toxins found in plants that can cause skin irritation upon contact:

These compounds can lead to a range of reactions from mild irritation to severe dermatitis, depending on an individual's sensitivity and the concentration of the compound. It's always best to handle plants known to contain these irritants with care and to wear protective gloves when necessary.



Saponins: Present in plants such as Snake Plant and Asparagus Fern, saponins can cause skin irritation and, in some cases, mild dermatitis.



Ricin: Found in Castor Bean Plant (*Ricinus communis*), ricin can cause severe reactions if ingested or if skin comes into contact with its seeds.



Urushiol: This compound is found in poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac. It is responsible for allergic contact dermatitis, causing itching, redness, and blisters.



Anthraquinones: These compounds, found in Aloe vera (in the latex), can cause skin irritation and digestive upset if used improperly.



Oxalic Acid: Present in plants like rhubarb leaves and some sorrel, oxalic acid can irritate the skin upon contact and cause more severe reactions if ingested in large quantities.



Sapogenins: Found in plants like Asparagus Fern, these compounds can cause skin irritation upon contact.



Cinnamaldehyde: Found in cinnamon and some ornamental plants, it can cause contact dermatitis, especially in those with sensitive skin.



Essential Oils: Present in many aromatic plants (like some varieties of oregano, thyme, and lavender), essential oils can cause irritation in those with sensitive skin, particularly if concentrated.



Furanocoumarins: Found in plants like Bishop's Weed and Celery, these compounds can cause photosensitivity and skin irritation when exposed to sunlight after contact.

