

Aglaonema modestum Chinese Evergreen¹

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Introduction

Easily grown, the attractive plants eventually form substantial clumps of green stems with 10- to 14-inch-long, shiny, deep green leaves. This lends a tropical characteristic to any shaded area planted with Chinese evergreen. The plant requires shade, making it well-suited to low-light conditions for house plants or sheltered, outdoor northern exposures. Temperatures below 45°F can injure the foliage.



Figure 1. Full form—*Aglaonema modestum*: Chinese evergreen.

General Information

Scientific name: *Aglaonema modestum*

Pronunciation: ag-lay-o-NEE-muh mo-DESS-tum

Common name(s): Chinese evergreen

Family: *Araceae*

Plant type: perennial; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Figure 3)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: mass planting; container or above-ground planter; groundcover; suitable for growing indoors

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 2. Leaf—*Aglaonema modestum*: Chinese evergreen.

Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

Description

Height: 1 to 3 feet

Spread: 2 to 4 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

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Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: spiral

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: undulate

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: green

Flower characteristic: summer-flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval

Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches

Fruit cover: fleshy

Fruit color: red

Fruit characteristic: showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in the shade

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; acidic; loam

Drought tolerance:

Soil salt tolerance: poor

Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Any fertile, nematode-free soil or artificial media is suitable for growth, yet aglaonemas will survive in peat and perlite, in sand, or can be grown hydroponically. They enjoy moist soil which is allowed to dry slightly before watering. Be careful not to overwater but do not let the soil dry for more than a few days. Aglaonemas require shade since direct sun will turn leaves yellow. They perform admirably in conditions too dark for most other tropical plants. They will succeed in low light, either as house plants or in sheltered locations on the north side of buildings, or under heavy shade of trees. They are attractive planted as single specimens, or in mass to create a tropical, coarse-textured effect. Space plants on 2- to 3-foot centers. Temperatures below 45°F can injure the foliage. Overwatering causes root rot and yellowing of the leaves.

Propagation is by cuttings.

Soil-borne nematodes and mites can be a problem for Chinese evergreen.

Design Considerations

The broad, deep green leaves and lush, leafy, irregular form of the Chinese evergreen will give the landscape a cool tropical feel. The mass of leaves with pointed tips and rippled edges creates a coarse texture and the light and dark shadows within the cluster of leaves emphasize the coarse texture. Pair with plants that are softer with small foliage and mounding or spreading forms, or grasses with thin, strappy blades and wispy flowers. Yellow-green, variegated green and/or burgundy foliage in the companion plants will highlight the deep green of the leaves. When pairing with other flowering plants use white and/or warm colors such as pinks, light corals, soft yellows, and light orange to contrast the deep green.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Roots can rot if the soil is kept too wet.