

Plant Introductions: Philodendron and Epipremnum

By DR. SMITH

I wanted to combine a few different houseplant groups this week, because you'll see how these all have similar growth patterns and care needs. There are many species within the genus *Philodendron*, but I'll focus on the vining varieties, which are often confused with another popular group of houseplants: *Epipremnum* and *Scindapsus* vines.

Some of the most common vining philodendrons you'll see hanging from baskets at your local nursery are *Philodendron hederaceum* (Heartleaf Philodendron), *Philodendron hederaceum* cv. 'Brasil', and *Philodendron hederaceum* cv. 'Lemon Lime'. These look very similar to *Epipremnum* spp. and *Scindapsus* spp. vines—commonly called "pothos."



Philodendron hederaceum cv. 'Brasil'

The various species within *Epipremnum*, and even some in the *Scindapsus* genus, are all referred to as "pothos," since they were originally described under that genus in 1880. Some common types of

Epipremnum include *Epipremnum pinnatum* cv. 'Aureum' (Golden Pothos), *Epipremnum pinnatum* cv. 'Neon' (Neon Pothos), and variegated varieties like *Epipremnum pinnatum* cv. 'Njoy'.

To keep things simple, I'll refer to them here as "pothos" and "philodendron."



Epipremnum pinnatum cv. 'Aureum' (Golden Pothos)

So how can you tell which one you have? Here are a few easy tricks:

- **Leaf shape:** Philodendron leaves have a more pronounced, curving heart shape. Pothos leaves are more rounded or oblong.
- **Aerial roots:** Pothos tend to have stubbier, darker roots than philodendrons.
- **Growth habit:** Philodendrons grow new leaves from a protective sheath, which dries and browns over time. Pothos do not form sheaths—new leaves emerge cleanly from the stem.



Differences between pothos (top) and philodendron (bottom).

The good news: Both groups are low-maintenance and thrive in a wide range of environments—including lower light levels. But remember, low light means *tolerate*, not *thrive*. Bright, indirect light is best.

Care Tips:

- Use a well-draining potting mix with about 3/5 coconut coir and/or vermiculite.
- Water only when the top 1–2 inches of soil feel dry.
- Fertilize monthly with a balanced, water-soluble fertilizer during the growing season. If plants are actively growing in winter, you can continue light feeding.

- Prune regularly to keep them bushy.
- Want to propagate? Just clip a vine with a full node (with visible roots) and pop it back into the potting media—it will root easily!



Epipremnum pinnatum cv. 'Neon' (Neon Pothos)

Pet safety: While not extremely toxic, both pothos and philodendrons can cause mild stomach irritation or mouth discomfort if nibbled on. Keep these plants out of reach of curious furry roommates!

Until next time: remember to stop worrying and learn to love the greenery!
