Dieffenbachias are easy houseplants that tolerate a wide range of conditions. They are popular in homes and offices for their colorful, large leaves.

The common name Dumbcane results from the fact that all the plant parts contain needle-like crystals called raphides. Ingestion of these crystals will result in a numbing and burning of the mouth and throat tissues. They can disable the ability to talk, and eye exposure is painful. Some people may get a skin rash from the plant’s sap. This plant can be toxic if eaten, causing the throat to swell and possible suffocation. In this case, immediate medical care is necessary. Dieffenbachias are not recommended if children or pets are present.

**Height/Spread**
Most dieffenbachias will grow from 3 to 6 feet tall and 1 to 3 feet wide. Individual leaves can be 18 inches long by 12 inches wide.

**Growth Rate**
Dieffenbachias will grow quickly in ideal conditions or barely at all if light is low.

**Ornamental Features**
Dieffenbachia is grown for its eye-catching leaves. Large, tropical-looking leaves in many shades of green are marked with spots, stripes, dots or colored veins.

**Problems**
In the home, plant diseases are very rarely a problem. Too much or too little water plus insects and mites are the main problems. Root rot usually results from a soil mix that does not drain quickly or overly frequent watering.

Mealybugs and aphids suck plant juices and heavy infestations will coat the leaves of dieffenbachia with sticky honeydew.

Too much fertilizer can cause marginal leaf burn. If plants are lacking nutrients, they may yellow, produce smaller leaves and become stunted.

**Culture**
Dumbcanes thrive when given bright filtered light in spring, summer and fall. Bright light, even direct sunlight, is best during winter. They will tolerate low light, but growth will be reduced.

Water thoroughly, then let soil dry to the touch to a depth of one inch. Dieffenbachias will grow well in...
most well-drained container soil mixes. They should be fed from March through September with a foliage houseplant fertilizer. Liquid-type fertilizers can be applied at half strength every two to four weeks, or you can use a time release fertilizer applied according to label directions.

Dieffenbachias enjoy normal warm household temperatures. Temperatures from 60 to 75 °F are ideal. Always protect dieffenbachias from cold and major changes in temperature.

As these plants mature, lower leaves naturally drop to reveal attractive, trunklike stems. If the stems become too long and bare, you can rejuvenate the plant simply by cutting the stems back to about 6 inches tall. The plant will regrow below the cut.

If repotting is necessary, do so in early spring. Propagation is by cane cuttings, stem tip cuttings or air layering done in spring or early summer.

Cultivars

- 'Camille' is one of the best-known dieffenbachia cultivars. It has creamy yellow leaves bordered in rich green. Its full growth habit gives it a lush appearance. It is a bushy variety with few problems.
- 'Compacta' is more compact-growing than other varieties. Its cream colored leaves are brightly mottled with green, and it has a very full growth habit. It is perfect for areas of the home or office where space is limited.
- 'Exotica Alba' has a leaf with a white center with a green margin. It has a compact growth habit similar to 'Compacta'.
- 'Hilo' is a large-leafed type that has pointed leaves with prominent white veins.
- 'Paradise' has soft yellow leaves covered with green speckles that radiate out from the midribs. Paradise has a more upright habit than either 'Camille' or 'Compacta' and will mature at nearly twice the height.
- 'Rudolph Roehrs' has creamy yellow leaves with white spots and dark green veins and margins.
- 'Snow Queen' has pale lemon to creamy gold leaves with white veins and dark green edges.
- 'Tiki' is an upright variety that is one of the largest dieffenbachias at maturity. It tolerates low light levels. It has silver leaves mottled with green and white.
- 'Tropic Snow' has wide-spreading, dark green leaves blotched in creamy white along the veins. It will tolerate lower light levels than most other dieffenbachias.

The ‘Compacta’ variety (Diffenbachia maculata ‘Compacta’) is a good choice for a home or office where the space is limited.

Barbara H. Smith, ©2015 HGIC, Clemson Extension

Revised by Barbara H. Smith, Horticulture Information Specialist, Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service. 09/15
Originally prepared by Karen Russ, HGIC Horticulture Specialist, and Al Pertuit, Extension Floriculture Specialist, Clemson University. New 03/99. Images added 09/15

This information is supplied with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service is implied. All recommendations are for South Carolina conditions and may not apply to other areas. Use pesticides only according to the directions on the label. All recommendations for pesticide use are for South Carolina only and were legal at the time of publication, but the status of registration and use patterns are subject to change by action of state and federal regulatory agencies. Follow all directions, precautions and restrictions that are listed.