

December Plant Highlights: Celebrations

**Please note: due to the ever-changing and growing nature of the Conservatory, plants may move locations and flowers and fruit may not always be visible.

Papyrus



Where do we find it in the Conservatory and why do we find it here?

The papyrus is in Sugar from the Sun near the taro plant. Papyrus enjoys warm, wet conditions, which is what most plants in Sugar from the Sun prefer. Also, Sugar from the Sun showcases plants that we use in our everyday lives—papyrus is one of these plants!

How does it grow or reproduce and what is special about it?

Papyrus is very flexible in its methods of reproduction, since it can reproduce through both rhizomes and seeds. The feather-duster-like tops of the papyrus are where the flowers grow and also make great nesting sites for birds. Thus, the plant is able to encourage its pollination through its structure.

How do humans use it or interact with it?

We have been using papyrus since Ancient Egyptian times! Ancient Egyptians used papyrus for baskets, sandals, blankets, incense, bowls, utensils, fuel, and of course, paper. Many people still use papyrus for these various purposes today. We can also use it ornamentally since it is such an interesting plant to look at!

How do we use it for celebration?

The first paper ever created was made out of papyrus, which is how the popular stationary store, “Papyrus,” got its name. As you write and receive holiday cards this season, you can think of this plant!

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Aloe vera



Where do we find it in the Conservatory and why do we find it here?

We can find *Aloe vera* in the Desert House. Aloe plants are a type of succulent, whose leaves have adapted to be able to store an immense amount of water. This enables aloe to survive in the absence of rainy weather, in places like the desert.

How does it grow or reproduce and what is special about it?

Aloe vera can reproduce asexually through offsets (small, complete daughter plants produced on the mother plant) or sexually through flowers. The aloe has flexibility in reproduction to increase its chances of reproduction. When it flowers, it shoots the flower up on a stalk so that it is more accessible to pollinators. Something special about how *Aloe vera* grows is that it forms mycorrhiza, an underground fungus that helps the plant access nutrients in the soil.

How do humans use or interact with it?

The gel in the leaves of *Aloe vera* plants often contains chemical compounds that have medicinal properties—many of the lotions and creams we produce contain aloe! These chemical compounds are also said to heal sunburns and minor burns. People also drink *Aloe vera* juice to aid in digestion, though there is no scientific evidence to support this benefit.

How do we use it for celebration?

Aloe vera is used in many nice lotions and moisturizers. We use *Aloe vera* in our lotions because it is said to have soothing, anti-irritant, and other medicinal properties. The part of the plant that we actually use for this is the sticky gel, which is found when the aloe leaf is broken in half. If you give a gift like this to somebody this holiday season, you can tell them that the gel from the inside of the leaf of the aloe plant helps give the lotion its soothing, moisturizing properties!

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Cinnamon



Where do we find it in the Conservatory and why do we find it here?

The cinnamon tree is located in Sugar from the Sun across from the banana plants. Cinnamon is an item that we use in our food, much like other plants you will find in Sugar from the Sun!

How does it grow or reproduce and what is special about it?

Cinnamon is cultivated in a very interesting way! It is grown for two years and then the young tree stems are cut down. This allows for lots of new growth from the roots the following year. We cultivate the cinnamon tree like this so that we can harvest its bark in a sustainable way. The cinnamon tree will reproduce with seeds, just like most other trees.

How do humans use it or interact with it?

Cinnamon is a common spice that is used all over the world for cooking, baking, candles, potpourri, and more. The part that we think of as "cinnamon" is actually the inner bark of the tree! When the inner bark of the tree is removed, it rolls up when it dries out, creating what we recognize as a cinnamon stick!

How do we use it for celebration?

When you think of the holidays, what types of smells come to mind? Cinnamon is a scent commonly associated with the holiday season! We use it to spice our apple cider, desserts, and the air through candles, cinnamon brooms, and potpourri!