



Author Tovah Martin, on right, with Alberta Valerio, SGC program chair.



Author of dozens of gardening books and articles, Tovah Martin signs one of her many books for fans at a recent Suburban Garden Club of Cheshire meeting. | Joy VanderLek / For The Citizen

Tovah Martin on the joy of houseplants

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The Cheshire Citizen

On the verge of a week-end snowstorm, author Tovah Martin spoke of orchids, ferns, creeping fig and

scented geraniums. Guests and members of the Suburban Garden Club of Cheshire heard her presentation at the Senior Center.

Gardeners just want to garden, and houseplants let you

live with plants in your home, Martin said.

Martin, a horticulturist, who lives in Roxbury, has written more than a dozen

gardening books including: "The Unexpected Houseplant," "The New Terrarium," and "Tasha Tudor's Garden."

Her garden advice has been seen in publications such as Coastal Home, Martha Stewart Living, House Beautiful, Connecticut magazine and

Yankee magazine. She's also been involved with the PBS television series Cultivating Life as well as teaching about houseplant cultivation to master gardeners.

Martin is an accredited Organic Land Care Professional and has received numerous awards for gardening as well as literary achievement. People, Places, Plants magazine called her "one of the top 10 most influential educators

in gardening" and the Massachusetts Horticultural Society honored her with its Gold Medal "for extraordinary service to horticulture especially greenhouses and indoor plants."

In an hour-long presentation, Martin spoke about the hardness of newer houseplant varieties, lighting needs for different plants, and dealing with indoor plant signs. On an overhead screen, she showed numerous examples of houseplants, common and exotic, for the audience to try at home.

It doesn't matter what your style is, she said. Whether it's 1950s retro, contemporary rustic chic, there are no excuses for not enjoying your favorite houseplants. For instance, at one time, African violets were so "yesterday" that don't denigrate yourself

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Use them like them, Martin said, marveling at the little blooms that make her happy.

Martin also discussed plants for small spaces. "Use your real estate," she said. To plant a plant and then also have it beneath it, too. Her lecture also included tips on oil canes, watering and houseplant problems.

Martin confessed to having a prolific number of houseplants, more than 200 in her own home — possibly more, she'd gotten tired of counting after reaching 200. "It's sickness really," she said, laughing. "When UPS can deliver a package to me without tripping over a green thing, then I am not doing my job."

Martin encouraged the audience not to be wary of houseplants, not to think of houseplants as difficult to grow or maintain — even in

of her outdoor plants indoors for the winter. She tends to take "samples" of her plantings, if not the whole plant, and then mixes and matches them in unique planters, such as peperomias in a small millstone, or she'll group plants in an artistic way. Again using peperomias, she'll group three together in soapstone containers. Another planting is shown in an old gutter she found, the display finished off with an old wasp nest.

Martin shows an artful Hiwathia fasciata, a zebra plant she placed into a picture frame to hang on a wall. "It might be dead," said Martin admiring the picture, "but I can't tell."

Mother-in-Law's tongue, sometimes referred to as the snake plant is in the Sansevieria family. "You can't kill it," Martin said, pointing out that the hardness of many indoor plants has been improved on.

are definitely poisonous to animals, many are not. There is a page on ASPCA.org that helps indoor plant lovers with choices if they are also cat lovers.

Light is a big consideration in choosing plants for the home as direct light can scorch many plants. Christmas cactus and aloes do not want full-on sun. Pelargoniums, scented geraniums, will

enjoy a bright spot on a sunny window. Bromeliads offer many choices within plant selection, as well as light needs. Most require indirect and filtered light. Noting the snowy forecast, Martin said snow tends to reflect and increase the light. An east-west window by the water will do the same.

For all those plants that occupy space in Martin's home,

it only takes her three-quarters of an hour to water. She uses baking trays under plant collections, and saucers, to make quick work of it. She does not generally schedule a day to water, as some in the audience did.

"If you water, and it runs right out the bottom of the hole in the pot, it's too dry," she said.