

Rules for Entertaining... a Horticulturist

While sitting in the dining room of a friend's house, some time ago, I was enjoying my third helping of Turkey Meatloaf when I thought someone was looking over my shoulder. An out of world presence seemed to be lurking in the shadows. I ignored it and put it down to the effects of the wine and pre-dinner cocktails. However the feeling persisted and as I glanced around the room I spied the culprit. Standing in the corner of the dining room, a once proud 5' Norfolk Island pine; it was dead!

Now, a dead Norfolk Island pine to the uninitiated may not look dead, in fact unless you crush the foliage which crumbles in the hand, you may suspect that the plant has taken on a lighter green winter colour attributable to the low light. However, this was definitely dead; as a professional horticulturist I know what a dead plant looks like and this was one big corpse standing in the corner. Through desert I would cast suspicious glances at the plant and then to the hostess, she and her husband seemed completely unaware that we were dining with a corpse. Finally I could contain myself no longer and I said "Are you aware that plant is dead?" The response was immediate, of course they knew, but what did it matter, it still looked green and besides they just had not gotten around to throwing it out.



I thought matters would end there but the following week we had a new staff member join our office and lo and behold she brought along a plant. As I walked towards her office I sensed something was amiss. These plants all stuffed into a little basket were ones I could not identify, perhaps some interesting and rare species but when I came within 30 feet of the arrangement (a professional horticulturist can spot fake plants at 30') I realized they were silk (maybe polyester). The new staff member was not around so I left a note saying that "since you are new to the office we will let it go this once, but we are training horticulturists and hence silk plants are taboo"; the next day the plant was gone.

The saga continued when I went home several weeks later to visit mom. In the front hallway was this rather healthy looking Ficus, now mom is not a gardener, if it is in the garden it may survive but if it's in a pot in the house mother's brown thumb is the talisman of death for all. I became doubly suspicious when I realized that the plant looked particularly healthy considering the hallway has no windows and indeed little natural light. It was fake, "mom what are you doing with a fake plant?" I asked, "Well everything that I put there dies so I thought this would look nice instead"



Now there are a few rules you must adhere to if you have a horticulturist in the family or invite one to dinner.

1. Dead plants are better than silk plants, at least you made an effort and if you continue to make the effort the local garden centre will love you (staffed by horticulturists) although it is wise to limit your friend's visits while you commit murder.
2. You can have dead plants anywhere in the house except in the bedroom (if the horticulturist sleeps over), the bathroom (this is purely a privacy issue, both dead and alive) and of course the dining room, since nothing should interrupt a good meal.
3. If you have a horticulturist as a friend, co-worker or family member it is illegal to have fake plants within 500 metres of them. This is a little known law adopted by parliament over 100 years ago to stop the Victorians from making plants out of old rugs.