

# The Solarium

A digital field guide for the  
curious environmentalist

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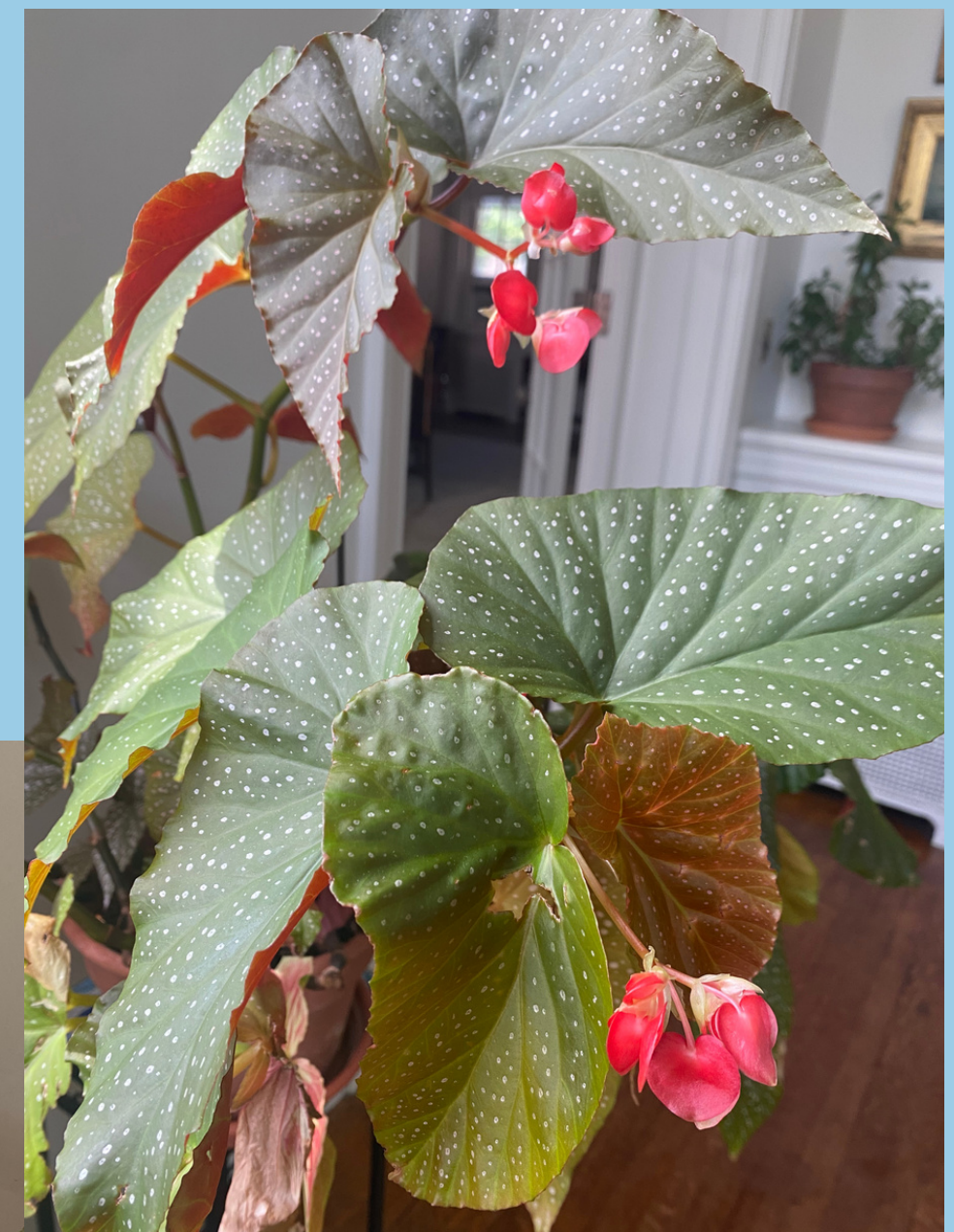


# Begonia Coccinea

## “Angel Wing Begonia”

Opposite the Umbrella Tree and the antique phone stands the ethereal Angel Wing Begonia. The feathery winged shape of the leaves sings of heavenly hosts, and pink blossoms drip down; the red underside of the leaves strikes a malicious contrast to the godly iconography. Alone on its own pedestal, this plant draws the eye and captures the imagination.

The Angel Wing Begonia is a special hybrid of the Brazilian Cane Begonia (*Begonia Aconitifolia*) and a Swiss Lucerna (*Begonia Coccinea*). The pairing was propagated in 1926 by Eve Kenworthy Gray, a home gardener in California, making this plant a uniquely American blend of international pieces—a truly Wilsonian plant.





# Schefflera Arboricola

## *“Umbrella Tree”*

If you look toward Edith Wilson's garden, you'll see on the floor to the left a squat gold canister holding two long stalks that climb to almost 5 feet and that are outfitted with wheels of 10 leaves spiraling out from a center point.

Known for its unique spoke of leaves, the Umbrella Tree is widely distributed in Southeast Asia and is a popular indoor houseplant. When grown indoors, it slowly reaches up to 4–6 feet, compared with its outdoor counterpart, which can shoot up to 25 feet fairly rapidly.

This species is known to have antiviral effects and can be used to treat the common cold, back pain, bone pain, and limb numbness.





# Crassula Ovata

“Jade Plant” or “Money Plant”



When you cross the threshold from the dining room and enter the Solarium, the first plant you'll see on your left is the Jade Plant. Once you look out toward the garden, you'll see this plant appear and reappear throughout the collection—speaking perhaps to a superstitious Edith Wilson.

Shrouded in superstition, this plant gets its scientific name from its appearance. “Crassula” means thick or fat, referring to the puffy and bulbous leaves; “Ovata” means egg-shaped, again harkening back to the pudgy leaves. “Jade Plant,” the more colloquial name, comes from the Chinese tradition of Feng Shui. The vivid green leaves resemble jade coins, connecting the plant visually to wealth and prosperity. Keeping a Jade Plant by the door is meant to invite money into one’s life, which might explain the positioning of the largest money plant, separate from the rest of the plants in the Solarium.



# Laeliocattleya

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## *“Betty Ford York Orchid”*



This winter-blooming orchid hybrid has presidential ties beyond its presence in the Solarium of Edith Wilson. This particular hybrid species was presented to Betty Ford, wife of President Gerald Ford, in 1982 at a floral convention in Denver, Colorado. It was named for her by the breeder, Hausermann Orchids, an orchid specialist located just outside of Chicago. Of the Hausermann orchids named for first ladies, the Betty Ford is the most popular, for its deep vibrant purple is striking compared with the delicate pastel color that is more traditional for orchids.

These plants frame the door to the garden in matching blue and white china pots. They represent one species of many orchids in the Solarium. It is said that during their courtship Woodrow Wilson would deliver a Cattleya orchid to Edith every single day and that it became a staple of her going-out attire; sometimes, she would even have five orchids at a time pinned onto her outfit.



# Phalaenopsis Amabilis

## “Moon” or “Moth” Orchid

Edith Wilson's favorite plant was the orchid, one of the things she is often remembered for. Orchids can be found throughout the Solarium. Amidst the miniature forest of green, these intricate flowers pop up in a variety of colors—white, pink, yellow, and greenish. Some are supported and reach toward the ceiling; others are left to spill over like a waterfall of blossoms. Their roots form fascinating twists that defy the viewer's expectations and, resting upon the rocky soil, offer themselves up for inspection.

Native to tropical and subtropical Asia, as well as northeast Australia, the Moon Orchid is one of the most popular species of orchid to be kept at home. A perennial plant, it features aerial roots, meaning the roots don't go inside the dirt. They remain close to the surface because orchids can grow on top of other plants. The roots can photosynthesize on their own, which explains their affinity for resting atop the soil.





# Saintpaulia Ionantha Diplotricha

## *“African Violets”*

The left shelf of the Solarium holds a few squat pots of these vibrant African Violets. Amidst the leafy greenery and elegant lilt of the orchids, these fuzzy friends are a bit of an outlier. They provide a more traditional look while still being intriguing on their own.

Native to tropical East Africa, the African Violet usually finds its home in the coastal lowlands and foothills of that region; however, due to significant habitat threats in the region, the African Violet is considered a vulnerable species in its wild form. It is most commonly cultivated for its aesthetic properties and as a houseplant.





# Philodendron Selloum

## *“Hope Selloum”*



As soon as you step into the Wilson House, the natural light streaming through the Solarium draws your eye to this window and this magnificent plant. Set in a beautiful East Asian pot, the Hope Selloum invites you to come around through either the library or the dining room, step into the center of the house, and enjoy this sun-filled oasis. Once you enter the Solarium, the plant becomes even more magnificent, as it reaches out toward you with its large, rich green leaves. It fits the space perfectly and serves as a centerpiece around which the other plants orbit.

Native to South America, this tropical plant is known for its oversize leaves and its suitability as an indoor houseplant. This plant appreciates a warm, humid environment, therefore making D.C. an ideal place for growth (especially in the summertime)!