

Houseplant

Care, Feeding and Growth

Learning to Water

The water needs of most houseplants are quite simple.

- Don't wait until the plant wilts, it is hard on the plant.
- Do not let the plant sit in water. The soil will remain soggy causing the roots to rot.
- Roots need air too, so be cautious not to keep plants too wet.

To check soil moisture insert your finger about an inch into the soil. Check plants weekly. As a general guideline if the soil feels dry, you need to water. However, some plants prefer the soil wetter than others. Cactus only need water when the soil dries out. Never allow watering to become a weekly "Saturday" routine. The frequency of watering will change with the season and the plants growth. Most plants will only need to be watered every 7 to 10 days in winter, while in summer they are actively growing and may need watering once or twice a week.

Humidity

Humidity refers to the moisture level of the air. Most plants need a more humid atmosphere. Low humidity can cause leaf tips to brown, buds and flowers to fall prematurely, and general decline of the plant. Higher humidity can be achieved by occasional misting, grouping plants together, and setting plants in pebble trays. Pebble trays hold excess water and allow it to gradually evaporate creating a small humid microclimate. Ferns and Norfolk Island Pines are the most common houseplants that prefer high humidity.

Fertilizing

There are many types of fertilizers to be used, but the important aspect is when to fertilize. Feed the plant according to label directions when it is actively growing, which will most often begin in spring. As the plant begins to slow its growth in fall, begin to reduce the fertilizer applications to once a month.

Slow release and water soluble fertilizers are both effective.

Lighting

Most plants like bright light in the home. East and west windows have excellent lighting for plants. Be cautious of plants in direct light as they may dry out quicker from being in the sun. When situating plants, consider the outdoor landscape. A large tree may shade south windows making it bright light in summer and direct light in winter.

Every plant has specific requirements, and are best placed by light requirements rather than how the plant looks in the spot.

Repotting

Repotting is the topic of much speculation and myth. Most houseplants do not mind being root bound, and some actually won't flower unless they are. Houseplants in general should be repotted about once every two or three years.

Increase the pot size by no more than 2". Putting the plant in a larger pot does not promote faster growth. In fact, the excess soil only holds water resulting in root rot.

Temperature

Houseplants are tropicals and they like warm temperatures. Most houseplants will tolerate temperatures that range from 55°F to 75°F; however, they do not appreciate rapid temperature fluctuations. Heating and air conditioning vents can rapidly dry out or burn foliage, so be aware of this when placing plants around the house. Drafts from windows and opening doors in winter can damage plants.

When transporting houseplants outdoors during cool temperatures, be sure to enclose them in a paper or plastic bag. Even short periods of cold (40°F and below) can damage buds, leaves and stems.

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Flowering Plants

These plants offer great color for a couple weeks to a month or more. Most should be considered temporary houseplants since it is difficult to get them to reflower as well as when grown in greenhouse conditions. Mums, forced bulbs, cineraria, poinsettias and kalanchoe are examples of short lived flowering houseplants.

Peace lily, lipstick plant, goldfish plant, Easter or Christmas cactus, cyclamen and African violet are some plants that will reflower reliably.

Troubleshooting

RAPID DEFOLIATION can be caused by extreme changes in temperature, changes in light intensity, over watering, under watering, or exposure to the cold.

GRADUAL DEFOLIATION (lower leaves yellow and fall) can be caused by over watering (root loss), under watering (lack of water to support full foliage), lack of sufficient light, or lack of fertilizer.

NEW GROWTH WILTED, BURNED OR BLACKENED can be caused by too much fertilizer, cold drafts, hot drafts, lack of water, sunburn, excess heat or damage from freezing.

WILTING OF THE ENTIRE PLANT can be caused by lack of water, too much water (roots rotted away), too much fertilizer (roots burned), or damage from cold temperatures.

SPOTTED FOLIAGE can be caused by over watering, over exposure to the sun, or bacterial or fungal infection.

BROWNING LEAF TIPS can be caused by low humidity, excess fertilizer, or hard water.

COTTONY MASSES ON STEMS AND LEAVES are caused by mealybugs. These insects often leave a sticky residue on leaves.

ROUND OR OVAL SHAPED BUMPS ON STEMS OR LEAVES are scales. These insects leave a sticky residue on leaves or nearby tables and furniture.

SMALL BLACK FLYING INSECTS that seem impossible to eliminate are fungus gnats. They are harmless to plants, but annoying to humans.

Houseplants for Low Light

Cast Iron Plant	Chinese Evergreen
Peace Lily	Philodendron Pothos
Snake Plant	
Swedish Ivy	Wandering Jew
ZZ Plant	

Houseplants for Medium Light

Arrowhead Plant	Cast Iron Plant
Dumb Cane	English Ivy
False Aralia	Ferns
Spider Plant	

Houseplants for High Light

Aloe	Bird of Paradise
Cactus	Croton
Ficus	Grape Ivy
Hoya	Ponytail Palm
Rubber Plant	Succulents