

## Indoor Foliage Plants

Want to jump in the houseplant jungle? Indoor plants are becoming increasingly popular because they are easy to take care of, provide health benefits, and can be used in a variety of indoor décor themes. Plants can be a great option for those who have little yard space for an outdoor garden or for those who live in climates with severely cold winters. Greenery brightens up indoor spaces and is known to have mood-boosting qualities. Beautiful, healthy houseplants are the perfect way to express your individuality and fill your home with life, texture, and color.

Whether you want a few, or have a jungle in mind, learning to successfully grow and care for indoor plants can be simple and fun. Following some basic principles will help you be successful in your new plant addiction!

### Light

Plants get their energy for growth through a process called photosynthesis, which can only happen with natural light. Some houseplants need less light than others, but even low-light plants grow weak and spindly without the light they need. Light-starved plants are more prone to pests and disease.

As a rule, plants that need high light do well in front of southern-facing windows. Place medium-light plants in east-facing windows or 2 to 3 feet away from high-light windows. Low-light indoor plants, such as ZZ plants, Pothos and Philodendrons, can tolerate north-facing windows and normal indoor lighting in most areas of your home. Be aware of trees and buildings outside. An obstructed southern window may get less light than a northern one.

### Plant Size

Take time to consider the space in your home so your plants do not quickly outgrow their ideal place. Small indoor plants, such as small Cacti and mini-Succulents or Pileas, can be relocated easily. Large indoor plants, like Palms and Yuccas, may only suit one or two sun-filled areas in your home. Hanging indoor plants, such as Pothos, String-of-Pearls, and vining Philodendrons, need space away from traffic so they can hang undisturbed.

### Watering

How often your plant needs water depends on numerous factors, including home temperature, plant type, and pot type. Plastic pots, for example, retain soil moisture longer than porous terra cotta containers.

Water houseplants with lukewarm water whenever the top 1 to 2 inches of your potting soil mix are dry. Before you water, do a quick check with a moisture meter or do it the old-fashioned way: stick your finger down into the soil. You are also able to tell how much water content is in the soil by picking up your plant and testing the weight of it. If the plant is light, it can be dry and vice versa. Ideally watering should be done by bringing your plants into a sink, a bathtub, or on your deck and watering thoroughly. Include spraying down the leaves with either the overhead shower or sink sprayer. This 'shower' will help keep the leaves free of dust and open the leaf pores to access more sunlight and air. It also gives the leaves a natural shine as well.

Improper watering is the No. 1 cause of houseplant damage and premature death. Underwatering causes wilting, yellow leaves with brown tips, or even loss of leaves and flowers. Overwatering results in wilting, yellow or black leaves, and fungal diseases such as root rot.

### Fertilizing

Well-fed houseplants reward you with healthy growth and, if you grow blooming plants, plenty of flowers. A high-quality fertilizer feeds plants and soil, creating an environment for sustained, vibrant growth. Blooming indoor plants, such as African Violets, Orchids, or Hibiscus require a fertilizer specifically designed to promote flowering. Keep in mind, as we move toward the darker winter months, plants begin their dormancy phase and fertilizing is not needed. Good soil is all your plants require until spring.

## Indoor Foliage Plants...continued

### Humidity

Many popular houseplants are native to tropical climates. While they tolerate most home's dry air, they grow better with higher humidity. Signs that your houseplants suffer from low humidity include leaf curling, yellowing, bud drop, and brown leaf tips. These are all signs of increased stress making your plant more susceptible to pests and diseases.

To keep your plants healthy and happy, you can increase humidity these easy ways:

- Mist your houseplants with a fine spray of water. Placing appropriate plants in a bathroom is ideal.
- Create a humidity tray by filling a saucer with small pebbles or polished stones. Add water just below the surface of the pebbles then place the plant on top. As water evaporates, it humidifies the air around your plant.
- Group plants together. Water evaporates from plant leaves in a process known as transpiration. When this occurs, the plants humidify each other.

### Pests and Diseases

Houseplant pests such as mealybugs, scale, and spider mites, can wreak havoc on your indoor garden. Even if you thoroughly check for pests when purchasing plants, some insects lay dormant and can show up later when you least expect them. For that reason, it is important to check weekly for signs of infestation. Look for insects, holes in leaves, and sticky substances excreted by pests as they feed. If you find pests, isolate the affected houseplant immediately to safeguard the rest of your plant family. The sooner you treat an infestation, the better off you and your indoor plants will be.

Disease is typically easy to spot. Plant growth will be stunted, leaves become yellow and spindly, and may even drop. Some diseases present as white powdery blotches or spots. Waterlogged soil, which is where the roots are not getting enough oxygen, can become root rot. Root rot produces weaker stems, black or mushy leaves, and black stringy roots. Remove your plant from the plastic grow pot, inspect the root's condition, determine a solution, and avoid further damage.

### Grooming / Potting / Transplanting

Keeping your indoor plants looking their best starts with happy roots. Your choice of a high-quality potting soil mix is key to your plants' health and happiness. An ideal mix keeps soil moisture consistent, so your plants do not become overly wet or overly dry.

Grooming and pruning your houseplants keeps them neat and attractive. Regularly remove dead foliage and spent flowers with scissors or pruning shears. If you trim leaf tips, carefully follow the natural leaf shape. The ends will maintain a brown edge that helps the plant until it is time to remove the entire leaf.

Typically, planting directly into a decorative container is not ideal for several reasons. Decorative pots will add weight making it difficult to determine if your new plant needs water. Keeping your plant in its original grow pot makes it simple to see the roots and check for problems. Decorative pots often do not drain well, allowing water to pool, which can lead to root rot and other diseases.

This is the perfect time to use the double potting method. Slip the plastic grow pot into the decorative pot. This is a basic houseplant tip that can save your indoor plants from root rot while still using the beautiful decorative pots that show your creative side.

Every year or so, check houseplants for signs that they need re-potting. Signs include slowed growth, roots growing out of drainage holes or above the soil line or having to water more frequently. Do not go too big too fast; move up one pot size at a time. Oversized pots require extra soil and excess water, which can lead to fungal disease and root rot.