

Houseplant Care

Houseplants bring the beauty of nature and clean air into your home. There are a wide variety of styles and size, foliage colors and textures to complement your interior décor. Most are very easy to grow and are well worth the time and effort. Here are some simple tips...

CARE:

Houseplants need conditions that resemble their native environment. Generally, forest floor plants do best in diffused light, tropical plants with humid, bright light and desert species in arid, direct sun. Read the plant tag or research the requirements for light, water, temperature or other specific needs. Consider the environmental factors in your home and place plants appropriately. Observe and tend to each houseplant faithfully.

LIGHT:

Plants will do best when their needs for proper light are met. High light plants need 5 or more hours of direct or bright light within 6 feet of a south-facing window. Medium light houseplants require several hours of bright or indirect light from a window or fluorescent lights. Low light houseplants do well in a room with little light, further from the window or from fluorescent lights.

WATER:

As a rule of thumb, most houseplants should be watered when the top of the soil is dry. Cactus and succulents need to dry out completely and be watered sparingly. Some houseplants need their soil constantly moist. It is important to know the water requirements for each plant to avoid the most common abuses, too little or too much.

TEMPERATURE & HUMIDITY:

Most houseplants are tropical and do well in rooms between 65 to 75 degrees (Fahrenheit), but others will tolerate as low as 55 degrees. Some plants grow best in the humidity of a bathroom or kitchen. Homes vary widely in temperature and humidity according to orientation, season, heat sources, doors and other factors. Be aware of these influences to assure proper placement of plants.

SOILS & CONTAINERS:

Houseplants require specially prepared soil to thrive since they are limited to the soil in their container. A general houseplant mix works well for most houseplants, cactus mix for good drainage, African violet mix to retain moisture and others for specific needs are available. Plants do best in containers with a drainage hole and with a saucer to protect furniture. Houseplants are showpieces and deserve decorative containers!

FERTILIZERS:

Water-soluble or time-release fertilizers work well for houseplants. Follow fertilizer directions for houseplants and err on the side of less, do not over-fertilize! During the growing seasons of spring and summer, fertilize regularly and then give the houseplants a break from fertilizer during dormancy in late fall and winter.

TRANSPLANTING, GROOMING & PROPAGATION:

Plants adjust well when transplanted only as needed and into a gradually larger container. This reduces the tendency to over-water and generally looks better. Houseplants occasionally need to be cleaned and trimmed of dead or damaged leaves or pruned to shape. Many houseplants can easily be propagated by leaf cuttings or dividing.

CULTURAL & PEST PROBLEMS:

Most houseplant problems are due to cultural or environmental stress, so check and adjust for these first. But they are also vulnerable to pests, such as mealy bugs, spider mites, aphids, scale and diseases too. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) encourages the less toxic approach first, cleaning with water or insecticidal soap, progressing to stronger pesticides only as necessary.

HEALTH BENEFITS:

Plants remove airborne contaminants. One plant per room will ensure good air filtration – honestly, the more the merrier! Studies have shown that houseplants improve both physical and mental health, reducing the effects of cold symptoms, headaches and allergies as well as blood pressure, insomnia, stress and anxiety. The aesthetic appeal of houseplants improves mood, concentration and creativity. There are lots of reasons for growing houseplants!

Resources: WSU Cooperative Extension – EB1354, Gardening Know How – www.gardeningknowhow.com, Importance of Plants in the Home – www.healthline.com