

How to Choose a Houseplant

What look?

- Upright – like Sansevieria (snake plant)
- Bushy – like Schefflera arboricola
- Trailing – Ivy or Wandering Jew, etc.
- Climbing – Jasmine
- Standard – Ficus or corn plants
- Architectural – Fan palms, Rhaps palm, topiary, cactus

Know your growing conditions to find plant that is suitable:

- Sunlight levels – North, South, East or West light and proximity to the window.
- Temperature – 45° F to 85° F
- Humidity
 - Can you mist daily? Have a humidifier? A humidity tray? Or 50-60% humidity?
- Air circulation – fan? Open window? Drafty?
- Small Children or Pets? Avoid poisonous plants
- Air Cleansing Plants- some clear air of off-gassing home chemicals, some add humidity.

When to Water Plants

More houseplants die from too much water than from any other cause. A dry plant asks for water by letting its leaves droop. An overwatered plant doesn't send out warnings—it sits looking fine while its roots are invisibly rotting away until it keels over, too late to save usually. Because plant roots need oxygen and water, it's a good rule to let the soil dry a little bit between waterings. Confirm by lifting the pot and if it's light, the plant needs water.

- The warmer the room the more often your plant needs water
- Plants in sun or bright light need more frequent watering than those in medium to low light.
- Small pots dry out faster than large ones, clay faster than plastic
- If plant is pot-bound, water will run through without wetting the soil.
- If pot is too large for rootball, the excess soil will retain too much water and roots will drown.

How to Water

- Use room-temperature water.
- Apply until water seeps through the drainage holes at the bottom of the pot.
- Pour out water that accumulates. Never let plant sit in water that remains in saucer

Light Levels – what they mean when they say....

- Bright Light: The brightest light you have without direct sun – so a south window backed away five to six feet.
- Indirect Light: This refers to sun that is filtered through a curtain or shade.
- Medium Light: A few feet back from a sunless window.
- Low Light: Bright enough to read by – relatively few plants can grow here so choose carefully.
- Plant Lights: Fluorescent lights turned on for 14-16 hours a day. The size and whether you choose traditional or full-spectrum depends on the quantity of your plants and the growing needs of your plants.

Fertilize – Yes! But with what, how and when?

Depending on what kind of plant a general houseplant fertilizer is best (all purpose 20-20-20).

The numbers on the fertilizer are the proportions of

Nitrogen: for the leaves of the plant

Phosphorus: for the roots

Potassium: for encouraging flowers

- Dilute your dry fertilizer to a weaker strength than that recommended by the manufacturer (double the liquid recommended). Liquid fertilizer has smaller numbers only because it has already been diluted.
- If you want a plant to stay smaller, feed it less often.
- Don't feed a plant when the soil is bone dry. Wet it first.
- Fertilize in Spring-Summer and stop fertilizing during Fall-Winter because that is its resting period.

Trimming Plants

- Reasons to Trim Plants:
 1. To keep them shapely
 2. To force them to branch (produces more blooms)
 3. To make compact
 4. To stimulate growth
- It is best to cut above a node (where a leaf emerges)
- Keeping plants trimmed back conserves energy that is otherwise wasted on long, ungainly stems.

Grooming

- Take off yellow leaves
- Remove faded flowers
- Wash plants with clean room-temperature water using a damp sponge or cloth. Gently wipe off dust or dirt on leaves. Smaller plants can be brought to the sink and showered off.
- Grooming and washing will unblock leaf pores so the plant can transpire (take in and emit) air and moisture.

Repotting- It's time to repot when

- Roots show through drainage holes of the pot or rise to the top of the soil
 - Water runs immediately out of the drainage holes
 - Leaves turn yellow
 - New leaves grow smaller and farther apart than normal
 - Best way to tell is to take the plant out of the pot and look at the roots. If the soil is encased in a mesh of roots or if long roots are wound around and around the outside of the root ball, repot.
1. Repot plants in a container one size bigger than the current pot, for example up to 12" from a 10".
 2. If you go to a pot too large, you can kill the plant because you are watering the soil and not the plant.
 3. Most plants can be potted in a an all-purpose potting soil mix. Exceptions are:
African violet soil -- more acidic than all-purpose
Cactus soil -- a mixture of sand and potting soil.

Reminder: Houseplants are prisoners of their containers.

This is your responsibility. It is important to choose the right type of plant for its pot and vice versa. Learn to recognize your plants' signals or changes in growth habits that indicate a change is needed.

Insects, Pests and Diseases come from

- New Plants
- Plants that were outside for a time
- Your clothing or pets
- Wind through an open window.

They are attracted to your home's hot, dry air and to plants that are suffering from lack of care. Keep plants strong and robust and inspect plants regularly.

Methods to remove and control pest infestations:

- Physical – remove and destroy affected parts of plants, ex. Aphids
- Cultural – proper watering and misting with water will keep plant healthy, help to wash off pests, allow plant to transpire and prevent attacks
- Biological – introduce natural parasites like lady bugs and praying mantis
- Chemical – choose right product for problem.
 1. Use correct dose.
 2. Spray outside if possible or use plastic bags to protect house, rugs and floor.
 3. Remove pets, fish and children where treatment is taking place.
 4. Protect hands and face when applying product.
 5. Remove and launder exterior clothing after applying product to prevent spread of chemical.
- Alternative remedies - homemade brews such as dishwashing liquid and baking soda.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE PESTS

Aphids - You can see them and they also excrete a sticky honeydew. In severe attacks, you'll see a powdery black sooty mold form on the leaves. Control: Pick off or wash off insects and/or pinch off stem.

Mealy bugs - Have a white, waxy, fluffy looking coating that help protect them from insecticidal sprays. They are found clustered in the leaf axils. They are usually found on succulents and cactus. There's also a root mealy bug. Control: Lift insect with cotton swab moistened with rubbing alcohol and or spray with equal parts of rubbing alcohol and water.

Root mealy bugs control: Wash soil or repot in fresh potting mix. If necessary, use systemic insectide.

Spider Mites- Usually found at tips of shoots. They produce fine webbing and the leaves will look curled, stippled or dusty. Mites overwinter in woodwork and other nooks and crannies. A hot, dry environment attracts them. Control: Remove invested shoots and increase humidity by misting or humidity trays. Insecticide control: Horticultural Oil.

Scale- Oval, smooth and brown- looking bugs or bumps found under leaves or on trunk of plant in bunches. Control: Scrape off with fingernail. Insecticide control: Horticultural oil, soap or most toxic malathion.

Thrips- Long-bodied bugs with fringed wings. They feed on plant tissue and cause a silvery and mottling on stems, foliage and flowers. Usually are present in large numbers and often seen hopping around plants. They deform flowers, bud and leaves. Damage is worse in hot, dry atmosphere. Control: give plant adequate water and increase humidity. Insecticide control: Horticultural oil, insecticidal soap or chemical insecticide labeled for thrips.

White Fly- Small white moth-like fly in large numbers, create a cloud when disturbed. They suck sap out of plants and secrete honeydew and leave sooty mold. Control: Yellow sticky cards. Insecticidal control: Horticultural oil or insecticidal soap.