

Indoor Plant Care

Growing plants in our homes can be a satisfying year-round experience that adds beauty, function, creativity, and multiple health benefits to our lives. This reference material will look at how to sustain thriving indoor plants by meeting all aspects of their care.

The environmental needs of the plants we wish to grow indoors need to be taken into consideration. The specific requirements of light, soil compositions, water needs, and nutrients all factor in.



<https://theindoornursery.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/1-plant-lighting-guide.jpg>

Light – Light is probably the greatest factor to consider when placing a plant in the indoor environment. We can categorize plants as having low light, medium light, or bright light requirements.

- **Low light** requirements - North facing windows get very little direct light and are best for these plants.

Plant suggestions: *Adiantum raddianum* (Maidenhair Fern); *Aglaonema commutatum* 'Maria' (Chinese Evergreen); *Aspidistra elatior* (Cast Iron Plant); *Chlorophytum comosum* (Spider Plant); *Dracaena sanderiana* (Lucky Bamboo); *Dracaena trifasciata* (Snake Plant); *Epipremnum aureum* 'Neon' (Golden Pothos);

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Hederix helix 'Adam' (English Ivy); *Plectranthus australis 'Variegata'* (Swedish Ivy/Creeping Charlie); *Spathiphyllum spp.* (Peace Lily)

- **Medium light** requirements - East facing windows get some morning direct light and are best for these plants.

Plant suggestions: *Alocasia spp.* (Elephant's Ear); *Aspidistra elatior* (Cast Iron Plant); *Asplenium nidus* (Bird's Nest Fern); *Guzmania sanguinea* (Scarlet Star Bromeliad); *Calathea makoyana* (Prayer Plant); *Chamaedorea elegans* (Parlour Palm); *Cycas revoluta* (Sago Palm); *Dieffenbachia seguine* (Dumb Cane); *Epipremnum aureum 'Pearls and Jade'* (Pothos); *Ficus elastica* (Rubber Plant); *Pachira aquatica* (Money Tree); *Pilea peperomioides* (Chinese Money Plant); *Peperomia spp.*; *Saintpaulia ionantha* (African Violet); *Scindapsus pictus* (Satin Pothos); *most fern species*

- **Bright light** requirements - South & west facing windows get the most direct sunlight late morning to sunset so are best for plants requiring direct or indirect bright light.

Plant suggestions:

Direct light – *Aloe barbadensis miller* (Aloe vera); *Crassula ovata* (Jade plant); *Dracaena marginata* (Dragon tree); *Escheveria and Sempervivum spp.*; *Pelargonium spp.* (Geranium); *Ocimum basilicum* (Sweet Basil)

Indirect light - *Aglaonema commutatum 'White Rajah'* (Chinese Evergreen); *Anthurium spp.* (Flamingo flowers); *Cycas revoluta* (Sago Palm); *Dieffenbachia seguine* (Dumb Cane); *Dypsis lutescens* (Areca Palm); *Ficus elastica* (Rubber Plant); *Ficus lyrata* (Fiddle Leaf Fig); *Monstera deliciosa* (Split leaf Philodendron); *Pachira aquatica* (Money Tree); *Peperomia spp.*; *Phalaenopsis spp.* (moth orchid); *Rhapis excelsa* (Lady Palm); *Saintpaulia ionantha* (African Violet); *Schefflera actinophylla* (Umbrella Plant); *Schlumbergera x buckleyi* (Christmas cactus); *Zamioculcas zamifolia* (ZZ Plant); *most fern species*

Soil – Indoor plants should be potted up in free-draining potting mix so the soil can dry out and the roots can get oxygen. Never pot up plants with heavy garden soil which can lead to waterlogging and root rot. Special potting mixes are required for orchids (containing bark chips), whereas cacti and succulents prefer a portion of coarse sand or small gravel.

Water – Research your plant's watering needs and create a schedule. The amount of water required by a houseplant will be determined by what kind of plant it is and the conditions in

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your house. Plants will usually dry out more rapidly in summer than in winter and plants use much less water when they are resting or dormant or if the temperatures are very cool. Most houseplants should be watered once or twice a week.

Most plants require some drying of the surface soil between waterings so you can use that as a guide. Others will require consistently moist, but not waterlogged soil. Pick up the pot and get used to its weight when it needs watering and use that as a guide. Another option is to push your finger into the top half inch of soil of the pot and feel for moisture. If it feels dry, water.

Overwatering and poor air circulation can lead to mold and fungus gnats.

Nutrients – Actively growing and/or flowering indoor plants do best with a routine dose of liquid fertilizer so pay attention to your selected plant's needs and use the appropriate dose outlined on the fertilizer label.

- Use a complete analysis water soluble fertilizer with N,P,K (20-20-20) and micronutrients.
- Fertilize houseplants every 2 weeks during the active growing season and once a month during the winter/dormant season.
- Can also use a quality compost but it is more difficult to predict how much you will need and is more difficult to incorporate.
- If leaves of the plant change to an odd color, refer to **“Plant Nutrient Deficiencies”** section of this reference manual.

Summer Vacation

Most **houseplants benefit from being moved outside** when the temperatures warm up in **late spring**. Once the temperatures reach between 10 and 15 degrees Celsius consistently at night you can safely begin transitioning your plants to outdoor summer living. Move the plants onto a covered patio or shady, sheltered location for a few hours a day, bringing them back into the house between. Gradually extend the time outside under cover over the next week bringing the plants in at night. After a week you can leave the plants out without bringing them inside, finding an appropriate place in your landscape to place them. Most houseplants will grow best in dappled shade or bright indirect sunlight.

In late summer, early fall when the night-time temperatures again reach around 10-15 degrees Celsius at night, start transitioning your plants to come back into the house. Bring all your houseplants under cover or into the shade for a week or so. Wash the outside of the pots and trays with soapy water, looking for hiding pests under rims and in the holes of the pot. Consider spraying off the leaves and replacing the top layer of soil. The following week bring the plants

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inside at night and leave them out under cover during the day. Gradually shorten the time they are left outside over the following week, then keep them inside in their appropriate places.

Monitoring and Managing Pests

Vigorous healthy plants that have been well-cared for have minimal pest problems.

- Common indoor houseplant pests are white fly, spider mite, fungus gnat, thrip, aphid, mealybug and scale insects on certain species.
- To prevent introducing pests, purchase the healthiest plant. **Quarantine a plant** away from other plants when you first bring it home or before bringing it inside from a summer outdoors.
- Watch for pests on the leaves and remove them:
 - o replace the top inch and a half of soil with sterile grow mix appropriate to the plant.
 - o spray water over the leaf surfaces while rubbing gently to remove any existing pests or eggs.
 - o Wash off aphids and mites.
 - o Pick off scale and mealy bugs with an alcohol swab.
 - o For white fly, use yellow sticky traps or insecticidal soap.
 - o For fungal gnats, water from the bottom, let the topsoil dry out, and/or use yellow sticky traps for flying adults.

Other Considerations:

- Some **easy houseplants for beginners** are Spider Plant, Cacti, Sansevieria, Tradescantia, Aluminum Plant, Pothos, Peperomia, Monstera, Ivy, Christmas/Easter Cactus
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- When situating your plants in your home be sure to **avoid direct sources of heat**; baseboard heaters, forced air heat registers and fireplaces.
- If the **plant requires increased humidity**, place the plant on a larger tray with moist gravel underneath or group similar plants together as their combined respiration creates a more humid environment. Some will thrive in the higher humidity environments of our bathroom or kitchen sink areas.
- Dust accumulates on the plant's leaves over time so **wipe the leaves every two weeks** with a damp cloth or rinse under the spray handle in the sink or shower.

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- Many indoor plants are toxic or **poisonous to pets and children** so check that before buying. Examples of some highly toxic plants are Lillies, Philodendron, Pothos, Arrowhead, Sago palm.
- Some plants like to be pot-bound while others will need **repotting to a slightly larger diameter pot**. Research your plant's requirements. If you do repot, do it during the growing season.

A well-cared for houseplant depends on getting to know your plant well and what it requires. Though not a one-size fits all approach, the investment of time to achieve great results is worth it.

References:

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<https://gardening.usask.ca/articles-and-lists/articles-indoor-growing/basic-houseplant-care.php>