

# The Houseplant Primer

HOW to have HEALTHY, BEAUTIFUL INDOOR PLANTS

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## Be deliberate and have a plan when choosing a houseplant.

Do some research about a plant before buying it.

Know where you will put it when you get it home.

Be sure you and your home can provide the conditions your new plant will need.

Be honest with yourself about the amount of time and effort you are willing to expend on your new plant.

Avoid a collection of various plants all rooted in one pot; consider collect like plants from a family group that you like and do well for you.

## Make an extra effort when the plant arrives home to assure its health.

Take your time in examining your potential new plant **before** making your purchase.

Examine the undersides of the leaves, check where the leaves attach to the stem, and gently shake the plant to see if anything fly's around the plant.

Before you put your new plant in your collection, rinse its leaves carefully, yet thoroughly.

Soak the pot and soil completely; allow the pot to drain on a rack.

Consider an application of extra fine horticulture oil or a systemic insecticide.

Consider placing the new plant in "quarantine" for two weeks.

If you are purchasing a mature collector plant, consider using a systemic pesticide.

## Consider all the elements that affect your plant.

### Pot

The material the pot is made of makes a big difference to the plant. Plastic nursery pots and glazed pottery do not wick moisture. The size of the drainage hole also determines how much moisture will be retained within the pot. What you might use to keep the soil from washing out of the drainage hole is a consideration as well. A good all around container choice is an unglazed clay pot.

Select a pot that is taller than the root ball- gravity pulls excess water from the pot. When repotting your plant chose a new pot slightly larger than the root ball; too large of a pot encourages stagnant moisture to build up.

### Soil

Good, generally PH neutral potting mix is readily available- professional potting mixes are the best. Try to avoid additives such as water reinitiate materials and even fertilizer so you can control those elements yourself. Long-acting fertilizers in soil can result in feeding dormant plants.

*Pro-mix*

*Turfus (top dressing)*

### Top dressing

Often, especially in a plant show, a top dressing of small stone, sphagnum moss or other material will be applied to the top of the soil. This material often serves to keep the soil evenly moist, eliminate moisture from the crown of a plant as well as to be decorative.



## **Ambient environment**

Most environments that are comfortable for you, is comfortable for the majority of house plants. For most houseplants, it is advised to avoid drafts from either heating systems or cold windows.

Most houseplants prefer humidity levels between 40 and 60 percent. Heating the home in winter can lead to lower levels of humidity. There are ways to increase humidity around plants. A room humidifier would provide increased humidity for the entire room. Grouping plants together will help raise humidity in the vicinity of the plants, as plants give off moisture through their leaves, allowing the plants to benefit from this evaporation. To increase the humidity more, place the grouping of plants on a shallow tray fill with pebbles or gravel. Add water to the bottom and as the water evaporates, the humidity is raised. The level of the water on the tray should be below the plant's pot, so that the plants are not receiving excess water

## **Sun and light**

**Full Sun:** 4 to 6 hours a day direct sun – try a southern exposure.

**South-facing windows** provide the greatest amount of light, especially in winter, when the sun is lower in the southern sky. Plants that need direct light or high levels of light do well in southern exposures.

**Medium Light :** 2 to 3 hours of direct sun, or 6 to 8 hours of bright indirect light, typically eastern or western exposure, or perhaps southern exposure but not placed directly near a window.

**West or East-facing windows** provide indirect light through most of the day and cooler temperatures. Flowering houseplants, which need cooler temperatures often do well in east facing windows.

**Low Light:** No direct sunlight, but some indirect light, or even 8 or more hours a day of electric lights (regular incandescent, fluorescent, etc.)

**North-facing windows** tend to provide the least amount of light. Plants that are tolerant of low light conditions may be able to grow in north-facing windows, but they should be placed within one foot of the sill. The light level may be slightly higher in summer when the sun rises from the northeast.

## **Food**

The best time to fertilizer a plant is when it is actively growing. During the winter, most houseplants cease growth and should not be fertilized. As the days grow longer, growth resumes and fertilizer may be applied. Usually fertilizing every 4-6 weeks. Be sure to follow the directions on the fertilizer package.

## **Water**

The water you drink is usually fine for your plants. Do not let your plants sit in water in a saucer.

One of the best watering routines for your plants is to put them into the sin; water thoroughly. After the water drains through the plant, water it again- look for bubbles coming up from the soil. Continue this process until the bubbles stop. Place the plant on a rack until it has drained completely. Tip the pot from side to side to remove any water from the corners of the pot. How often you should water your plants depends on the type of plant.



## **What's my plants problem?**

### **White "crust" on plant pots.**

Are an acclimation of minerals from the fertilizer and water you apply. If you have frequent build up of this crust, reconsider how much fertilizer you apply and consider using softer water.

### **Tips or margins of leaves turn yellow, brown or look burnt.**

Too much fertilizer.

Plant too dry for a short period of time.

Plant exposed to too low temperature for short period.

### **Lower leaves turn yellow and sometimes drop.**

Usually caused by over watering.

May occur when a new plant is moved from a greenhouse to a low-light, low-humidity environment.

### **Yellowing and dropping of leaves through out the plant.**

Over watering.

Poor drainage; sitting in a wet saucer.

Tight soil.

Cold draft.

### **New leaves are small.**

Soil too dry for long periods.

Poorly drained soil.

Tight soil mixture.

### **New leaves with long internodes.**

Not enough light

Room temperature is too high.

### **Spotted leaves**

Sunburn (distinct light tan spots),

Cold water on leaves (especially fuzzy leafed plants such as African violets),

Leaves touching cold windows,

Bacterial or fungal disease (spots may have concentric rings or brown border),

Mite damage (looks like tiny yellow speckles),

### **Black soot on leaves.**

Sooty mold grows in the honeydew or secretion of many common plant pests, such as aphids or scale produce. The pest covers the leaves of your plant in honeydew. The sooty mold spore lands on the honeydew and begins to reproduce. Address the plants insect problem, then wash the plant leaves well in one part dish soap to ten parts water.

### **White 'dust' on leaves.**

Is a fungal disease called powdery mildew often caused by too much moisture or too little air movement? It can be treated with an indoor fungicide or one part cows milk to ten parts water. After treatment, remedy the issue that created the mildew problem.



## **Durable houseplants**

All houseplants require at least a modicum of care, but some are less demanding than others. Some of the more durable houseplants include:

### **Dry house:**

(*Sansevieria trifasciata*) Snake plant

(*Aspidistra elatior*) Cast iron plant

### **Low light:**

(*Chamaedorea elegans*) Parlor palm

(*Aglaonema modestum*) Chinese evergreen

### **Cool temperatures:**

(*Dracaena fragrans*) Corn plant

(*Dracaena deremensis*) dracaena

### **Normal house conditions:**

(*Philodendron scandens*) Heart-leaf philodendron

(*Epipremnum aureum*) Golden pothos

(*Chlorophytum comosum*) Spider plant

## **Where can I go to see great indoor plants?**

### **Tower Hill Botanic Garden**

11 French Drive, Boylston, MA 01505-0598

### **Philadelphia Flower Show**

Pennsylvania Convention Center

Philadelphia, PA.

Saturday March 11 - Sunday March 19, 2017

### **Boston Flower & Garden Show**

Seaport World Trade Center

Boston, MA.

Wednesday, March 22 through Sunday, March 26, 2017

### **The 2015 Newport Flower Show**

Rosecliff Mansion

Bellevue Avenue, Newport, RI

Friday, June 23 – Sunday, June 25, 2017