



INTRODUCTION TO HOUSEPLANTS

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Watering: This is probably the most important part of plant care. Too much as well as too little water can kill a plant. That is why it is necessary to know the plant and its requirements. It is wise to use room temperature bottled water or water taken from the tap. Do not use water that has been run through a water softener. A good rule of thumb is to water your plants when the soil feels dry an inch below the top. Check plants in larger pots weekly and smaller pots more often. Use your finger or a pencil to do this. Clay pots are porous and plants in them will need watering more often than the ones in plastic and ceramic containers. The simplest way to water is at the kitchen sink. Water from the top and allow the water to run through the root system and out the bottom of the pot. Do this at least three times. Never allow your plants to sit in the water as this can cause root rot. Add 1 teaspoon of vinegar to a gallon of water once a month or so to eliminate salt build up and to lower the pH of the water.

Light: All plants must have light to manufacture food and to grow. Plants will grow long, weak stems and pale leaves, if light is insufficient. They may not flower (if a flowering plant) and will eventually die. However, always take into account that the plants' light needs vary as with other requirements. Films and screens on windows help save energy by diminishing the amount of light let in.

Fertilizing: Allow new plants to adjust to their new environment at least a month before fertilizing. Give newly potted plants time to grow new roots to absorb the fertilizer you are going to apply. Use any powdered, liquid or tablet fertilizer specifically designed for houseplants. The best ones are those that have their nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium in a 1-2-1 ratio. For example, a fertilizer marked 5-10-5 or 10-20-10 on the package is ideal. Actually, the best time to fertilize is when they are in active growth such as during the spring and summer. Most houseplants are fertilized in order to maintain the plant and not to produce fast growth.

Air: Plants need air, just as we do, for both their roots and their leaves. Use a fork to aerate if the plant is in a plastic pot. Poke the fork about a half-inch into the soil to avoid damaging roots. Always work from the outer rim to the center. Remember, living plants filter the air and provide a healthy place for humans to live and work.

Humidity: This is very important for every houseplant. Remember that many of these plants grow in the tropics. The closer we come to approximating their natural habitat, the better they'll grow. Occasionally, use a spray bottle with water to mist your plants.

Grooming: Plants absorb light and air through their leaves. Cleaning the foliage not only improves their appearance, but also helps the plants to stay healthy. Keep your plants well groomed by snipping off all dead leaves and by pruning when necessary. The information in this chart is for

plants that are in pots proportional to their size and that have good drainage, such as holes in the bottom of the container, so excess water will drain freely.

Soil Media: Do not use native soil; use non- soil media sold for containerized plants.

Temperature: A daytime temperature of 65°F to 75°F with a drop of 10° at night is ideal for most of these plants.

Light: Direct sunlight through a window striking a plant usually damages the plant; it gets too hot. Bright, indirect sunlight or lamplight for 8 hours or more each day is ideal.

PLANT NAME	LIGHT	WATER	COMMENTS
African Violet <i>Saintpaulia ionantha</i>	B	1	Avoid getting cold water on leaves.
Aloe <i>Aloe spp.</i>	A	3	Media must be well-drained soil. Do not overwater.
Aluminum Plant <i>Pilea cadierei</i> *	B	1	Too much shade makes these plants spindly and short lived.
Amaryllis <i>Hippeastrum x hybridum</i>	B	2	Keep media evenly moist but not wet during growing and flowering periods.
Arrowhead Vine <i>Synogonium podophyllum</i> *	C	2	Use as hanging plant. Leaves are shaped like an arrowhead. Do not transplant too often.
Asparagus Fern <i>Asparagus sprengeri</i>	A	1	Best under pot bound conditions. Be careful so pot does not break.
Begonia <i>Wax begonia spp.</i>	B	1	Good drainage is necessary for all begonias.
Bird's Nest Fern <i>Asplenium nidus</i>	D	1	Do not let soil dry out. Individual fronds may grow 2 feet or more.
Bromeliad <i>Bromeliaceae</i>	A	1	Keep center cup, formed by the leaves, filled with water.
Cactus <i>Cereus spp.</i>	A	3	Survives best in well-drained media or coarse sand. Do not overwater.
Cast Iron Plant <i>Aspidistra elatior</i> *	D	2	Hard to kill. Good low-light plant for homes and offices. Very good for beginners.
China Doll <i>Radermachera sinica</i>	B	2	Leaves will drop if not maintained with plenty of water.
Chinese Evergreen <i>Aglaonema modestum</i> *	D	2	No sun shining directly on leaves.
Christmas Cactus <i>Schlumbergera X Zygocactus</i>	A	3	Do not overwater.
Coleus <i>Coleus blumei</i>	B	2	Watch for mealy bugs under the leaves and on the stems. Does best in bright light.
Creeping Charlie <i>Plectranthus purpuratus</i> *	A	2	Likes medium to high humidity.
Croton <i>Codiaeum variegatum</i>	A	2	Mist plant periodically to increase humidity.
Crown of Thorns <i>Euphorbia splendens</i>	A	3	Sensitive to high humidity.
Cyclamen <i>Cyclamen persicum`</i>	C	2	Gift plant sold from April through June. Likes medium humidity. Mist frequently. Prefers cool temperature; goes dormant in winter temperature.
Dieffenbachia (Dumb Cane) <i>Dieffenbachia spp.</i>	B	3	Keep out of reach of children and pets. Tongue will swell if plant is chewed.
Dracaena <i>Dracaena deremensis</i> <i>D. fragrans</i> <i>D. massangeana</i> <i>D. marginata</i> <i>D. racana</i> *	C	3	Do not overwater.
Echeveria <i>Echeveria spp.</i>	A	3	Low humidity. Needs good drainage.
English Ivy <i>Hedera helix</i> *	A	2	Satisfied with little light. Does well in artificial light.

PLANT NAME	LIGHT	WATER	COMMENTS
False Aralia <i>Dizygotheca elegantissima</i>	B	2	Wash leaves monthly with clear water. Mist frequently.
Fiddleleaf Fig <i>Ficus lyrata</i>	B	3	Allow media to dry between waterings or roots will rot.
Geranium <i>Pelargonium spp.</i>	B	2	Can be placed in protected area outdoors in summer.
Gloxinia <i>Sinningia speciosa</i>	B	1	Reduce watering frequency when leaves start to die.
Gold Dust Plant <i>Aucuba japonica</i> *	D	2	Suffers in heat over 70 degrees. Good shade tolerance.
Grape-Ivy <i>Cissus rhombifolia</i>	B	3	Pinch back plant to keep it shapely.
Hoya (Wax Plant) <i>Hoya carnosa</i>	B	2	Vining plant - looks best in a hanging container.
Jade Plant <i>Crassula argentea</i>	A	3	Needs good drainage. Do not overwater.
Kalanchoe <i>Kalanchoe blossfeldiana</i>	C	3	Suffers below 55 degrees.
Moses in the Cradle <i>Rhoeo spathacea</i>	D	3	Likes fluorescent light. Occasionally clean the leaves.
Nerve Plant <i>Fittonia spp.</i>	B	1	Needs high humidity.
Norfolk Island Pine <i>Araucaria heterophylla</i>	A	2	Nice living Christmas tree.
Palm, Areca <i>Chrysalidocarpus lutescens</i>	B	2	Some will take morning sun. Areca palm leaves yellow if they are in high light.
Palm, Kentia <i>Howea fosteriana</i>	B	2	Fronds will die if the media is allowed to dry out between waterings. Let media dry out 2 inches deep and then water. Keep moist but not wet. Slow growing. Spider mites a problem.
Palm , Parlour Palm or Neantha Bella <i>Chamaedorea elegans</i>	D	1	Let media dry out 2 inches deep and then water. Do not let soil completely dry out.
Peperomia <i>Peperomia spp.</i> *	B	3	Foliage should be washed frequently with tepid water to keep it clean.
Persian Violet <i>Exacum affine</i>	A	1	A seasonal plant. Short lived.
Philodendron <i>Philodendron cordatum</i> *	D	2	Remove dried or discolored leaves as they appear. Keep moist but not wet.
Philodendron, Heart Leaf <i>Philodendron scandens oxycardium</i> *	D	2	Remove dried, discolored leaves as they appear. Keep moist but not wet.
Philodendron, Split Leaf <i>Monstera deliciosa</i> *	D	2	The brown aerial roots attach to supports or they may eventually root in the soil. Keep moist but not wet.
Poinsettia <i>Euphorbia pulcherrima</i>	B	1	Avoid drafts. Place outdoors in protected area in the summer. Will wind burn. Seasonal plant.
Pothos - Devil's Ivy <i>Scindapsus aureus</i> *	D	3	Roots may rot and die if soil is soggy, wet and poorly drained. Shower or clean occasionally.
Prayer Plant <i>Maranta leuconeura</i>	C	1	Needs humidity. Mist frequently.

PLANT NAME	LIGHT	WATER	COMMENTS
Rubber Plant <i>Ficus elastica</i> *	A	3	Always let soil dry out between waterings.
Schefflera (Umbrella Tree) <i>Brassaia actinophylla</i> <i>Schefflera arboricola</i>	B	3	Prone to spider mites. Clean leaves occasionally. Prune as needed.
Snake plant <i>Sansevieria trifasciata</i> *	C	3	Does well in artificial light. Stands up well to dry air.
Spatheflower - Peace Lily <i>Spathiphyllum spp.</i>	C	1	Remove entire flower stalk from the plant when blooming cycle is completed. Keep moist. Dries out fast.
Spider Plant <i>Chlorophytum spp.</i> *	D	2	Will grow outdoors in summer in protected area.
Succulents <i>Crassalaceae spp.</i> (Various varieties)	A	3	Cultural requirements much like cactus.
Thanksgiving Cactus <i>Zygocactus X schlumbergera</i>	A	3	Likes cool temperatures.
Ti Plant or Cordyline <i>Cordyline terminalis</i>	D	2	Needs good drainage. Media should not be too dry or too wet.
Purple Velvet Plant <i>Gynura aurantiaca</i>	B	3	Do not get the leaves wet. Needs good drainage.
Wandering Jew <i>Tradescantia spp.</i> *	B	2	Foliage green and white colored, green or variegated.
Weeping Fig <i>Ficus benjamina</i>	A	2	Moving or changes in temperature or light causes dropping of leaves. Repot and cut back roots every two to three years.
Yucca <i>Yucca spp.</i>	B	3	Plant several canes of varying heights together for a pleasing effect.

Light Requirements:

Listed are the minimum light requirements for these houseplants. However, plants that will grow in the C and D categories would do better in the B light range.

- A. Partial direct sunlight (morning sun only)
- B. Bright indirect light
- C. Medium light
- D. Medium to dim light

Water Requirements and Soil Texture:

These are just as important for a plant as the light requirement.

1. Keep soil moist at all times
2. Keep soil barely moist at all times
3. Let soil dry between waterings

*Best plants for beginners

For more information:

Master Gardener Help Line

702-257-5555 or

702-222-3130 or

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