

Andy's Garden

Guide to Houseplants

Benefits of Houseplants Indoors

Horticulture experts have long ago described the many health benefits of placing houseplants or tropical plants in the home or workplace. The most important being photosynthesis, where plants capture light and use it to process water and carbon dioxide so they can release oxygen into the air. Second, plants have the ability to rid the air of pollutants and toxins. They support human health in other ways too. A home or office lush with greenery has a calming effect and therefore reduces stress for better well-being.

We are going to focus on a few basic areas of houseplant care to help you successfully place houseplants throughout your home or workplace - temperature, light, watering and fertilizing.



Temperature

The houseplants we carry are considered tropical or tender to our area. They thrive in temperatures between 60°F to 75°F and suffer damage below 50°F. Some are so sensitive to cold that a few minutes exposed to freezing temperatures can kill the plant. If you are purchasing houseplants in winter time, just remember to protect it from time of purchase till you can place it within the home where it is warm again.

When placing houseplants, be mindful of cold drafts next to windows and doors. On the other end of the spectrum, be careful of too much heat. Placing a plant above a heat register can cause it to dry out more quickly and suffer from low humidity. If you place a plant above a heat register, add a tray of pebbles beneath the plant pot to hold water and act as a humidifier.

Light

Know the amount of natural light in your home. East, West and South facing windows provide the most light. A majority of houseplants prefer bright indirect sunlight except cactus and succulents, they do prefer direct sunlight. Flowering houseplants prefer partial sun from an East or West facing window. There are also a few houseplants that can be grown in low light situations. If you don't have adequate light coming in through windows, consider purchasing an artificial grow light to aid in providing enough light for plants to thrive.

Signs of not enough light

- Flowering houseplants not blooming
- Weak, spindly or leggy growth
- Leaves are smaller than usual
- Plant seems to be growing tilted toward the light source

Signs of too much light

- Flowering houseplants bloom but dry up quickly
- Dry and shriveled up leaves
- Leaves are faded in color
- Plant is droopy overall

Watering

Houseplants will use water at varying rates depending on the time of year, light, temperature and plant size. Over-watering is the most common problem causing houseplant failure. Most houseplants fall into three basic categories to help simplify watering needs as we have listed below, but if your houseplant comes with specific watering instructions, by all means, follow those instructions.

Foliage Houseplants – Do the finger test to determine water needs. When the soil feels dry to the touch one-inch down in the soil, water enough so it drains through the drainage holes at the bottom of the pot. Try to water at the soil level and keep the foliage dry to avoid spotting the leaves or causing disease issues. During the winter months, water less often to allow plants a rest period. Just be careful of letting them dry out too much if they are close to a heat source.

Flowering Houseplants – The soil can be kept moist at all times, just not wet or standing in water. Do the finger test on flowering plants as well to determine if they are in need of water.

Cactus and Succulents – Their native habitat is a dry and sunny climate, plus the thick leaves have the ability to store water. They can go completely dry in between watering. In the winter months, provide very small amounts of water infrequently.

Note: Water with room temperature or tepid water. Cold water has a shock effect on plants.

Fertilizing

Quick basics on fertilizer – what do the numbers mean, 20-20-20 or 5-5-5? The three main components of fertilizer are, nitrogen – phosphorus – potassium. The first number is nitrogen, for overall growth and leaf health. The middle number is phosphorus for roots and blooms while the last number, potassium supports overall health and growth, plus aids in flowering and fruiting. Organic fertilizer (5-5-5) percentages are typically lower numbers than synthetic fertilizers (20-20-20). Various micro-nutrients that are also essential, are listed below the main three components.

Types of Fertilizers

Water soluble – This is a fertilizer that is diluted with water and can be applied once a week, once every 2 weeks or once a month. An example of a water soluble fertilizer is Miracle Gro® All Purpose Water Soluble Plant Food. Mix ½ teaspoon per gallon of water. Apply at soil level and keep it off the foliage. Hold off on fertilizing during the winter months to allow plants a dormant or resting period.

Slow Release Granules – This is an easy and convenient way to fertilize. Simply sprinkle correct amount on top of the soil and the granules will gradually dissolve with each watering. Apply every 6 months. Examples of slow release granule fertilizers are Osmocote® Smart Release 15-9-12. 1 ½ tablespoons for large indoor potted houseplants. Shultz® All Purpose Extended Feed Plant Food 19-6-12 can be applied at a rate of 2 teaspoons for a 12 inch pot.