

Winter Houseplant Care

I always find that my home seems a little bare after the holidays when the tree is taken down and all of the holiday knick-knacks are put away. To be quite honest, it can be depressing! The winter months can be extremely long for many people.

One way to brighten your home up a bit is to add a new houseplant. Right after the holidays, you will find new shipments of houseplants arriving in stores.

The plants in the stores will look great, but they may not stay that way for long once taken home. One reason for this is because these plants are grown in a climate and light controlled greenhouse. Our homes are definitely not even close to greenhouse conditions. But a few simple things can help you grow your houseplants with more success.

Plants grow during high light times, such as summer, and that is the time to provide ample water and fertilizer. Winter is a low light time and plants should be allowed to go dormant. During dormancy, do not apply fertilizer and supply only small amounts of water. Remember, plants grow in the summer and sleep in the winter. Don't force a plant to grow during the winter.

Light is probably the most essential factor for indoor plant growth. A plant needs light from five directions. Obviously this is not possible in most homes. But you can increase light availability. To acclimate a new plant that was grown in high light conditions, place it in a high-light (southern exposure) area of your home and gradually move it to its permanent, darker location over a period of four to eight weeks.

Most foliage plants prefer day temperatures between 65 and 75 degrees with night temperatures usually 5 to 10 degrees lower. Avoid extreme temperature changes, such as cold and hot air blasts from windows, radiators, heating and air conditioning vents.

Ninety-five percent of plant problems are caused from incorrect watering. How much water a plant needs is influenced by several factors. Not only is the individual plant size and species important, but also the growing conditions. Light, temperature, humidity, container type, container size and finally soil type all influence the speed of growth and therefore the amount of water needed. It is best to look up individual plant types for their watering needs.

Frequency of fertilizer application varies somewhat depending on the individual plant. Some need it every two weeks, while others will flower well for several months without any supplementation. As a general rule, fertilize every two weeks from March to September.

Here are some common plant symptoms and possible causes:

General defoliation

- Sudden change in temperature
- Transplanting shock
- Sudden change in light intensity
- Over-watering

- Lack of light

Browning of leaf tips

- Improper watering
- Exposure to cold drafts
- Insect attack
- Excess fertilizer

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