

Caring for Houseplants



Adding tropical plants to your interior living spaces is a great way to improve the aesthetics and atmosphere of your home or office. Beyond simply providing something pleasing to look at, houseplants have been shown to improve the indoor air quality by removing toxins like benzene and formaldehyde. These toxins are often the result of using synthetic materials in the construction and furnishing of your home.

Caring for your houseplants need not be onerous or time consuming. A little attention on a regular basis will ensure that your plants remain healthy and attractive. Here are a few tips to remember:

Water, but not too much!

A good reference point for determining soil moisture is to routinely lift the pot so you can get a feel for the weight of a moist or dry plant. If in doubt don't be afraid to push your finger into the soil to see if it's wet. Be careful not to drown your plant. Overwatering is the most common problem for house plants. Cacti, Agloenemia, Dieffenbachia, Aloes and Orchids generally require less frequent watering than other houseplants.

Keep your plants neat and tidy.

Regularly check out the appearance of your plants. Clip off any unsightly leaves or branches and clean the leaves with a dry paper towel or soft cloth. You can also bathe the plants in your sink or bathtub with mildly soapy tepid water. Pruning straggly or untidy plants will encourage a more dense and controlled form. To prune take a cutting just above (about 5 mm) a bud or leaf node and cut on an angle.

Turn your plants regularly.

Rotating one side of a plant towards and away from a window will ensure that they get proper light exposure and that they do not grow lopsided. A plant that is left in an overly dark area may need to be moved to a sunny window on occasion to make sure it's getting enough light. Certain plants, like Ivies, Philodendrons, and Peace Lilies, can tolerate more shade than other houseplants.

Insects

Routine inspection of your plants may reveal evidence of disease or insect infestation. If you don't recognize the bug, it's a good idea to consult your local garden centre to help identify the pest and determine the best treatment. Insecticidal soap can be used for spidermites, while *Trounce* is effective on Mealy Bug, and Fungus gnats can be treated with a soil drench of Safers Soap and sticky traps.

Avoid large temperature fluctuations.

Most houseplants grow best under Tropical conditions - warm and moist. Avoid putting your plant in a drafty area or in an unheated room during the winter. Summer conditions may allow you place your houseplant outdoors for a while, but try to avoid burning them in the direct sun.

Fertilize.

Fertilize plants with a water soluble fertilizer like 20-20-20 once per month from April to September.

Repot as necessary.

At a certain point your houseplants will grow to the point where they become root-bound by the pot. At this point water and nutrient uptake may be compromised and it will be necessary to move the plant into a larger pot.