



# Houseplants: Care and Maintenance

The best houseplants are those that thrive well in the conditions of your indoor environment. That environment is significantly different than that of your outdoor garden plants. Despite being significantly different, the most popular of houseplants are those whose needs match cooler, drier, and darker (far less light) conditions of your home or office.

Due to conditions in the home, many indoor plants grow very slowly or even go dormant during the late fall & early winter months, and their needs are much different than your outdoor plants. In general, those needs are far less demanding as a slow growing plant requires less of most everything that you would normally provide your outdoor plants.

There is a saying in the gardening world that you can "kill your plant with kindness." This saying is even more true indoors as the plants need less, rather than more.

---

## Temperature:

Indoor plants generally prefer a controlled temperature range. The ideal range is usually 65 to 75 degrees in the daytime and 60 to 65 degrees at night. This range may vary by type of plant but is the most common range. Many indoor plants do not like to be placed in a drafty area. In addition, while you may think you are helping your plants by placing them in a sunny window, they can experience wide temperature extremes as the sun heats them in the day and the cold comes through the window at night.

**Not convinced?** Place a thermometer next to your plant on a frigid evening. Check the temperature just before you go to bed.

---

## Light:

In general, houseplants need less sunlight than outdoor plants. This is largely because the selection of indoor plant varieties is geared toward plants which thrive in shady or indirect sunlight.

This does not mean that your plant does not need sunlight or will not benefit from sunlight during some portion of the day, and some varieties will require more sunlight than others. A lot of us will chase the sunlight as it moves from window to window on a sunny winter's day. Read up about the type of plant you have, and if your plant shows signs of light deficiency, join the rest of us and chase that sunlight!

You can also buy artificial gro-lights. These will help those plants that require more sunlight than you can provide. You can also use gro-lights if/when you sow your garden seedlings in the spring.

**Tip:** Rotate the container every few days so all sides of the plant get a chance to "see the light!"

---

## Humidity:

During the winter, your home or office is normally much drier than other times of the year. Sometimes this gets a bit beyond the tolerance range of your plants. Your plants will benefit by an occasional "sponge bath." Take a damp cloth or sponge and wipe the leaves once a week or two. This has the added advantage of removing dust buildup on the leaves.

You can also use misters to add humidity to your plants during the driest of winter days.

**Important:** A few plants like African Violets do not like to get their leaves wet and water on them will cause damage.

---

## Soil:

Most houseplants like a balanced soil with a slightly acidic pH level. Use sterile potting soil from your garden supply store. It will contain a good mix of nutrients to get your plants started in their indoor environment. It will also be properly blended to provide good drainage yet retain moisture.

Even if your plant does not grow much, it should be repotted every couple of years with fresh potting soil. The old soil loses important minerals over time.

Over time the top layer of soil can become encrusted. Loosen it with a spoon or fork. Remove the top layer and add some fresh, sterile potting soil.

---

## Fertilizers:

Here is where you can really "kill your plant with kindness." Because your plant is growing much slower than in an outdoor environment, its needs are less. It is using far less nutrients. So, those nutrients can build up to harmful levels if you fertilize too frequently.

We recommend you buy a balanced, slow-release indoor fertilizer. If you use liquid fertilizers, use it once every two weeks...or less.

---

## Watering Plants:

While many plants' needs vary, in general, you should keep your soil moist, but not wet. Here is where learning about your specific plant will really help.

Many houseplants like to get a good soaking of their soil. Apply water to the point that it drains through the pot and out the openings in the bottom of the pot. This helps to remove excess fertilizer and salt that can build up in the soil. Outdoors, nature performs this task during a spring or summer downpour. After giving the soil a good drenching, allow the soil to almost completely dry out before the next watering.

**Did you know?** Your tap water likely has chemicals that your plant does not like in any excess amount. Those chemicals are sodium (salt) and chlorine. Use distilled water where possible or capture rainwater. If you leave a container of water out for a day or two, the chlorine will dissipate.

---