

INDOOR PLANT: MAINTENANCE AND CARE

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Indoor plants are not just beautified indoor spaces or not necessarily be confined to the living room alone, but they can be placed in bedrooms, kitchens, staircases, balconies, verandahs, terraces, patios and other locations. These indoor plants are not restricted to residential houses only. There is a tremendous scope in the use of these plants in beautifying offices, hotels, hospitals and almost all public buildings. In the modern concept and practice of indoor gardening, the scope of growing plants has been extended to many areas. Almost all types of house plants are being used as indoor plants depending on the environment, particularly light and temperature. The importance of keeping plants indoors is that it never goes out of season. The pleasure and thrill of growing indoor plants are immense. Indoor plants kept inside the house known as indoor gardening bring an intimate and natural association of the man and the plants and enliven the indoor environment bringing life and freshness.



It is a matter of joy to many especially those living in cities where they don't have enough space for garden and gardening. Where outside air quality went above 500 AQI (Air Quality Index) in November 2024 in Delhi which was the most dangerous to breathe. For them, a well-maintained single ornamental plant itself makes a garden. Indoor plants are now commercially used inside homes, offices, shops, banks, hotels, restaurants, clubs, hospitals, universities, colleges and schools. Indoor plants form an integral part of decoration in a home or any building. They add charm to the architectural beauty of the house and complement the interior setting as well as improve air quality, enhance mood and create a calming environment. The modern architectural design of homes having larger windows, central heating built-in 'Planters' and well-lighted rooms on the one hand and lack of space for gardening for field growing in congested dwelling houses on the other has made indoor gardening a popular, useful and absorbing hobby. Beautiful healthy indoor houseplants are the perfect way to fill home with life and colour. Indoor plants in different parts of the house are no different from the other living members of the home. They demand love and care from us and a few routines to be followed. Here's how to take care of them so that they are in the best of health at all times.

Care of Indoor Plants

Sun Exposure: Most indoor plants do not require too much sun. However, they all do well if they are regularly exposed to the sun for a few days before bringing them back in. Not only is sunlight a crucial element for photosynthesis, but it also acts as an antibacterial and prevents the onset of diseases and insect attacks. Make a schedule of taking each plant out for a few days every 8 to 10 weeks. The plants placed outside the rooms such as on balconies, terraces, patios, etc. don't require any shifting if sun exposure is there.

Watering house plants: It has been observed that the pattern of watering the plants frequently even when the soil doesn't require any extra moisture due to which overwatering takes place, is the number one cause of plants dying. Remember biggest killer of indoor plants is overwatering. As plants may not die due to lack of water it has been observed that indoor plants mostly die due to excess water. To prevent plants from dying, water only when the soil seems a bit dry. Also ensure that the soil is well-drained, as most plants hate wet feet. Cacti and succulents need less water; flowering plants usually need slightly more. Whenever there is a tour or out of the home for a few days create a humidity tray by filling a saucer with small pebbles or polished stones. Add water to just below the surface of pebbles then place the plant on top. As water evaporates, it humidifies the air around plants. Another method is group planting of plants, bring the pots all together, water evaporates from leaves due to transpiration plants and they humidify each other. Before planting check for drainage holes other roots can rot due to standing water.

Check their placement: Plants are kept near a glass window that is closed throughout the day; there is a chance that the glass gets excessively hot due to direct sun. This can increase the temperature near the glass, which might char the leaves or even burn out a delicate plant. In winter excessive cold causes the plant freezing injury. Similarly, some plants don't like a direct draft of air from the fan or the AC. If the plant is in distress, move the plant from its current position within the same room or move it to a different room.

Remove dried leaves and dust from plants: One advantage of keeping plants indoors is that you can constantly keep an eye on them. Take a close look at the state of the plant; this way you can catch any disease or distress early before it causes much harm. One of the easiest things to do is to pluck out any dead leaves or wilted flowers every week. This prevents pests from settling on dead and decaying leaves and reserves the plant's nutrition for optimal use by growing leaves. It is good for aesthetic reasons, as well.

Almost all indoor plants look better with regular cleaning. Dust collects on leaves, so wash them with a gentle shower of room-temperature water or dust them with a soft brush if the plants have hairy leaves which can hold onto moisture and encourage disease. For plants with smooth leaves, use a cloth to gently wipe away any dust that collects on leaves. Not only does this improve the plant's appearance, but it'll also help it in photosynthesis.

After taking good care of the plants, still find precious plants that have been hit by an insect or fungal attack, remove them and keep them away from other plants. The most commonly occurring pest is the mealy bug, a small, white and sticky creature. Leaves turning scaly brown are a symptom, too. Sometimes the infection can spread and harm more plants than one. In the absence of direct sun and fresh breezes, the infection spreads quickly. Also, remove yellow, brown, or withered leaves. Use a narrow-blade hand pruner or sharp scissors to make a clean cut without tearing the plant's stem. It's a good idea to wipe off the blades of pruners with rubbing alcohol before moving on to a different plant to avoid spreading any pests and diseases, most devastating is a virus that cannot be controlled otherwise.

Fertilize Plants Periodically: To make plants healthy, give them small, regular doses of nutrients. Like overwatering, it's important to avoid over-fertilizing plants. Too much fertilizer can burn roots and stunt their growth.

For flowering varieties, use a fertilizer NPK 19:19:19 @2gm/l and more potassium during the flowering stage twice a week in the growing stage. Most plants put on a growth spurt in spring and summer, so this is the best time to fertilize them. During the short days of fall and winter, most house plants don't need much.

Propagate Houseplants When Needed: Several types of houseplants benefit from being propagated by division or other methods once in a while. It helps to rejuvenate an overgrown plant and encourage fresh growth. Plus, it's an inexpensive way to get more plants out of already available. Some indoor plants, such as aglaonema, and Aspidistra send up new shoots at the base of the plant or offsets, which can be divided and put into new pots. Climbing houseplants such as philodendrons and pothos form new roots where their stems come into contact with soil. Root new African violets, and rex begonia from a single leaf; just put the stem end in a bit of water for a couple of weeks. Other houseplants, such as spider plants and begonia reproduce by sending out runners with new plantlets at the end. Annual plants for indoor can be made available through seeds which can be placed in window boxes. Most of the foliage plants can be multiplied through cuttings in the spring or monsoon periods.

Repot Overgrown Plants: If the plant has outgrown its pot, transplant it into a slightly larger container. If it is to be kept in the same pot, trim off some of the roots with a sharp knife and replant it into the container using fresh potting media. During repotting indoor plants, it's also a good time to divide those with multiple stems to create new plants. Spring and summer are the best seasons for repotting the houseplants. Repotting can be done in the spring season or the monsoon season for better growth and development of plants.

Common signs that pot plants need a new home:

- The plant simply looks like it is too big for its pot
- The roots are growing out of the drainage holes or on top of the media
- Not absorbing water and remaining on top of media
- The soil is dried out or looks dull

Pinching and Pruning: Pinching means removing stem tips, either with fingernails or pruners. Pinch out the tip of a stem and the topmost leaves to encourage the growth of lateral shoots. Plants that grow rapidly often look best with frequent pinching to keep them compact and fuller. Regular pruning keeps plants healthy and prevents them from replanting. It can be done any time of the year, but fall is a natural time to break out pruning scissors after a summer growth. The main reasons for pruning plants are to make them look better and keep them from getting too large and in better shape. The cut must be above the leaf nodes at a 45-degree angle to promote full growth. This technique is effective in encouraging new growth for trailing plants such as ivy and pothos that may have become bare at their bases. Try to make cuts just above a set of buds or side shoots on a stem want to cut back from which new growth will start. Also, remove dead or diseased branches or stems and leaves to prevent the problem from spreading any kind of infestation.

Control Insect-Pests: Several insects commonly attack house plants. The use of insecticide is effective for the treatment of any pests such as aphids and spider mites etc. A forceful spray of water from the hose helps knock down the population of these pests, too. Rubbing alcohol is effective on insects with waxy coatings such as scale and mealy bugs. Some diseases are spread by insects, so keeping the insect population in check helps prevent these problems. A few common houseplant diseases to keep an eye out for include powdery mildew looks like powdery white spots on leaves, fungal leaf spots can be yellow, brown, or black spots on leaves, and root rot mushy, dark-coloured roots usually caused by overwatering can be checked by spraying fungicides. For root infestation drenching is better.

Choose Plants Wisely: Certain plants can do well in indoor conditions; it might be prudent to choose from among these plants. Any plant can survive and last longer indoors yet choose plants wisely, depending on the sunlight conditions in the room.

So, choose plants wisely indoors, as these plants need extra care than the plants placed outside. Most commonly grown indoor plants with low maintenance are aglaonema, asparagus, areca palm, aspidistra, chlorohytum, peperomia, money plant (pothos), peace lily, snake plants, philodendron, ferns many more. Plants like roses, chrysanthemums china aster, carnations, marigolds, dahlias, etc can be displayed on balconies as well as in a sunny area of the house as flowering plants need 6-8 hours of morning sun for proper growth and flowering. For indoor plants to survive long-term, they need an environment that closely matches their native habitats. If that's not possible, it's better to choose a more suitable plant for space, rather than one that may look good but will die quickly so, choose plants wisely.

Does and don't (winter)

1. Limit watering

Winter is known as the quiet season in the garden, it means less light. And generally speaking, less light means less water. With limited sunlight in winter, plants use less water than they do when they are actively growing in spring and summer. In winter do not follow any watering schedule; it's better to check how the potting mix feels before watering. Check with your fingers if the soil is dry, and water the plant thoroughly. If the soil is moist, wait a couple of more days and check the soil again.

2. Exposure to sunlight

In winter days are short, and sunlight received by plants is less than it receives in spring and summer. So, bring plants closer to windows to get the advantage of as much light. If plants are kept on the floor, place them on a stand to get them closer to natural light. Rotate pots a quarter turn each week to ensure all sides of plants get sunlight from time to time.

3. Don't worry about dropped leaves

Most of the plants shed their leaves during the onset of winter as plants are preparing them self for rest in winter. Leaf drop coming into winter is normal and is nothing to worry about.

4. Avoid temperature extremes

Normal household temperatures that comfortable for most houseplants during the winter. However, extreme temperature changes, even for a short time, can cause problems. Keep plants away from cold drafts, radiators, and hot air vents. Sudden hot or cold drafts can stress plants out, cause cold damage, or dry them to a crispy crumbling feel.

5. Avoid fertilizer

Most plants rest in the winter and there are hardly any activities going on in plants. If it is so that cannot be visible. These plants don't require any fertilizers. Stop fertilizing in the fall and feed them in spring as plants receive more sunlight.

6. Check the plants for pests

Winter is prime time for tiny sap-sucking insects such as aphids and scale to pop up. Spider mites are another common winter pest because they like warm, dry conditions. Turn plant leaves over and inspect their undersides every time during watering. Check along stems, too. If any pests appear try wiping them off with an alcohol-soaked cotton ball. For large infestations, insecticidal spray and neem oil are safer options for getting rid of houseplant pests.

7. Maintain the humidity level

The air inside our heated homes tends to be drier in winter months. Most houseplants, especially those originally from tropical areas of the world, grow best when humidity levels are between 40-50%, but wintertime humidity levels are typically 10-20% inside homes.

A simple way to ramp up the humidity around plants is to cluster them together. Water evaporating from the potting soil, as well as water lost naturally through the leaves, will raise the relative humidity right around plants. Another easy method to increase humidity is to place plants on trays filled with pebbles and water. The bottoms of the pots should be above the water level to avoid root rot. As the water evaporates, it creates a more humid microclimate for houseplants.

8. Keep foliage clean

Take maximum advantage of the limited wintertime sunlight that makes its way to plant leaves by clearing dust and grime from the foliage by using a duster. Or give the whole plant a quick rinse in the shower to make short work of cleaning off the foliage.

9. Resist Repotting Houseplants

Plants take well to repotting when they are actively growing. That's why spring and summer are the best times to repot houseplants. However, doing so can shock dormant or resting houseplants.

