

News Article

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Indoor plant care

As the snow flies and we spend more time indoors, many enjoy the aesthetics and continued “gardening” opportunities by growing indoor plants. However, many have also found that indoor plant care has its challenges.

“Indoor plants help create a pleasant home environment,” wrote B. Rosie Lerner, Purdue Extension consumer horticulture specialist. “Small plants add color and scenery to windows or tables, while larger ones soften and blend with groups of furniture.” As a part of the “indoor landscape,” plants create a cool, spacious feeling, even in the warmest weather.

By knowing the challenges, most indoor plant problems can be easily corrected and even more easily prevented.

Many of the indoor plants we enjoy are actually tropical plants, used to lots of sunshine and high humidity. These are conditions that are very difficult to reproduce within the home.

Light is the first consideration. Plants will vary in their light requirements. Natural light from the window may not be enough. Bay windows offer easier access to light. However, supplemental lighting may be required for plants to thrive.

Temperature and ventilation are also important. “Most indoor plants do well between 60 and 75 degrees F,” wrote Lerner. “Always keep plants away from hot or cold drafts, warm appliances and heat registers.” However, proper ventilation is necessary for good plant growth.

Humidity is perhaps one of the more difficult conditions to provide indoor plants, even with humidifiers. Grouping plants together or setting pots in a wet gravel tray will help to raise humidity in the microenvironment around the plants.

Proper watering is key for any plant, indoors or outdoors, and according to Lerner improper watering is the cause of most house plant problems. Under- and over-watering can cause problems. “Check plant soil daily to see if they need water (soil dry ¼ inch down and tapped pot sounds hollow),” she wrote. “If needed, add water until moisture drips out of the drainage hole of the pot.” Lerner said to wait a few minutes and water again, then discard drainage water. If watering from the bottom, wait until the top of the soil is moist. “Never keep ordinary indoor plants standing in water continuously,” she wrote.

“Water your houseplants with a dilute fertilizer solution, especially during the summer,” wrote Lerner. Slow release fertilizers can also be used. However, little or no fertilizer is necessary during the winter.

Find additional indoor plant care tips by reading Lerner's Purdue Extension publication, "Indoor Plant Care," available at www.edustore.purdue.edu.