

Success with Houseplants

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



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Houseplants add life and color to make indoor spaces a little more interesting. Successfully growing houseplants starts with understanding their needs.

Successfully growing houseplants starts with understanding their needs. Houseplants contribute to and become part of the interior decor, but they are not furniture or knickknacks. They are alive, and like all living things, they have certain requirements that must be met to be healthy.

The primary requirement among those is light. Light is the energy plants use to create their food. No matter how hard you try, you

cannot grow a plant where there is not enough light – no matter how good it looks in the location.

Houseplants often are spur-of-the-moment purchases, but planning will bring about more consistent and satisfactory results. So before you obtain plants, walk through your home and think about where plants would be appropriate. Focus particularly on areas where the family spends a lot of time, such as

the kitchen or living room.

Then consider where there is sufficient light, how many plants you should get and how large those plants should be. In addition, ask such things as will they sit on a windowsill, on the floor or perhaps in a hanging basket?

After deciding those things, choose a plant that will survive in the location where you intend to place it—particularly in regard





to the amount of light the spot receives. Different types of houseplants will grow in higher or lower light conditions.

Ask the nursery staff to help with the selection of plants that may be right for you, and make sure there is a tag in the pot with the name of the plant on it. Without a name, you cannot look up information or ask someone for information about the plant later.

Houseplants generally are grouped into high-light, medium-light and low-light categories. High-light levels are provided by unobstructed east, southeast, southwest and west facing windows. Medium-light levels to high-light levels are provided by unobstructed south facing windows. North facing windows provide low-light levels. Low-light levels also may be provided by placing plants several feet from east, west or south facing windows.

Place plants where you have determined they will get the proper amount of light. Then within four weeks to eight weeks, the plant will generally indicate if there is a serious problem. Whether there actually is enough light in the area is, after all, it's the plant's "decision," not yours.

If there are no pests present and the plant has been watered

properly, a deteriorating condition usually indicates insufficient light. Move the plant to a brighter location.

People are always obsessing over how to water their houseplants. For most plants, it is really quite simple. Stick your finger into the pot every few days. If the soil feels wet or moist, don't water. If the soil feels dry, water.

Do not allow plants to wilt before you water them. This stresses them and can cause leaf drop, flower bud drop and brown leaf edges.

Apply water until some runs out of the pot's drainage holes and into the saucer underneath (or water them at a sink and let them drain there). That way you know that you have moistened the entire root ball. But don't let the pot sit in a saucer full of water. Remove the water in the saucer if it is still there a few hours later.

Newly purchased houseplants should not be immediately repotted. If the plant does well, repotting will eventually become necessary.

When repotting, the new container should have drainage holes, since there must be some way for excess water to drain out of the soil when we water. Otherwise, we run the risk of the soil staying saturated, drowning

the roots and encouraging root rot.

Choose a pot you find attractive that fits well with your interior decor. Clay, plastic or other materials all are appropriate as long as they have drainage holes.

Use soil specifically blended for use only in containers – which is called "potting soil." Do not use topsoil or garden soil products or soil you dig up from your outdoor garden beds.

Professionals use soilless potting mixes made up of peat moss, perlite and vermiculite, because those work so well. Soilless mixes are available under various brand names. You must, however, regularly fertilize plants grown in soilless mixes.

With consideration given to their needs and a commitment to providing the care necessary, you can grow a wide variety of wonderful plants in your home.

