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Houseplants

Plants have been grown inside our homes for centuries! There is historical evidence of plants being grown inside for the past three thousand years in China, and indoor plants have been a sign of wealth historically. In the past few decades, houseplants have become commonplace, and we can all now enjoy healthy plants inside our homes.

There are benefits to having live plants in the home. Having several healthy and growing houseplants in a room will, as all plants do, take in carbon dioxide and release oxygen. Many of our most popular houseplants were also found by NASA to absorb and neutralize a number of hazardous chemicals common in low concentrations in modern homes. Live plants change the acoustics in homes with hard floors, giving a more natural sound environment. Homes with as little as 2% of the floor space covered in live plants have a much healthier average humidity, a slightly more humid environment that is better for breathing. There are also psychological benefits attributed to having living plants in the home environment, ranging from improved concentration to stress reduction. These things are hard to measure, but most of us would agree there's something to it. The last benefit is the simplest - a healthy plant is beautiful, and that's the best reason of all to grow one.

Selecting and Placing your Houseplants

There are hundreds of different species of plants grown for indoor use, and their growing conditions vary enormously. Choose a houseplant that will fit the space you have to grow it in, or one that can easily be kept pruned to that size unless you are willing to change out your plant every few years. Look closely at the area you propose to put your houseplant, and select one that will tolerate the light condition of the space. Most plants are perfectly happy near a sunny window, and we have a selection of more shade tolerant plants for lower light areas in the home. Don't place your houseplant in direct contact with or right next to window glass. Your plants will be much hotter than they should be in sunlight and colder than they should be come winter, so give a small buffer of space between your plant's leaves and the pane.

Note: Very few plants will do well long term in an interior room without a little natural light or specially made artificial lights. If you want to put plants in these kinds of areas, we recommend you purchase several of the same type of shade tolerant plant, then rotate them to a better lit area to keep them healthy.

Care and Maintenance of Houseplants

- **Watering:** Each type of common houseplant has a different watering need, which should be observed; however, a typical houseplant will do well being watered once a week in a normal indoor location, or twice if placed in a sunny room. During the winter, reduce your watering unless the plant shows signs of need. In all cases, the "finger test" isn't a bad indicator. When the soil in your container is dry to the second knuckle of your finger, soak the plant. Don't water if the soil is moist. Remove excess water from the saucers once the plant has thoroughly drained.
- **Fertilization:** Use an even-and-balanced water soluble fertilizer at indoor rates (typically, 1 tsp/gallon of water) once per month during the growing season. It is not necessary to fertilize indoor plants from November to early March. Specific houseplants can have differing nutritional needs and preferences, but this is a good general purpose feeding for most.

- **Salt:** Tap water has a modest amount of dissolved mineral salts, and when the water evaporates, you're left with a whitish residue of salt. Small amounts are harmless, but excessive salt can burn leaf tips and plant roots. Prevent this by occasionally taking the plant to your sink or bathtub, and watering the plant slowly and thoroughly. Allow the plant to drip dry in the basin, then put the plant back in its normal saucer. This leaches out excessive salt and keeps your plant in the best condition.
- **Transplanting:** Your plants will need to be transplanted from time to time as they grow. Use a container that's slightly larger than the original (around 2" wider), and ruffle up the root ball of the plant to loosen roots. If the plant is root-bound, cut a shallow slice down each quarter turn of the soil ball to assist in loosening the roots. Be aggressive; if the roots winding around the bottom of the container look unhealthy, damaged, or are a solid brick of wood, prune off up to an inch of the bottom of the root ball. Use a quality potting soil (Covington's) in the new container as backfill, and transplant the root ball at a height that leaves a little room in the top of the container with the original root ball's top at soil level. Soil filled right to the top of the container makes the plant difficult to water.

Common Houseplants and Their Uses

There are a huge number of different plants grow indoors. Below are some of our most popular choices:

Used for Greenery/Foliage Texture & Color

- **Airplane plant** - Use in hanging baskets or spillover pots, most commonly variegated yellow-white and green leaves, makes "pups" on the ends of long stems that are easily propagated, good for air cleaning. A plant that takes neglect well and almost any indoor light condition.
- **Calathea** - High light exposure, leaves can be burnt if left in full sun. The calathea plant has large oval shaped leaves with very distinct color, and can grow to be 2' wide and 2' tall.
- **Croton** - Wildly variable in color and leaf shape, typically with orange, green, yellow, and red colors. Bright light gives the brightest colors, as croton grown in low light will grow mostly green leaves. Best in bright light, a mid-sized bushy plant.
- **Dieffenbachia** - Green and white variegated leaves, suitable for filtered light areas inside the home. A small to mid-sized plant.
- **Dracaena** - Most commonly called "corn plant", the thick strap like leaves on thick canes make a nice upright houseplant. 'Janet Craig' is dark green, 'Warneckii', and 'Lemon-Lime' are variegated with white and yellow to contrast with the green, and they'll grow in almost any light exposure. Dracaena are also excellent air cleaning plants!
- **False Aralia** - Dark green, tall stems, thin leaves with soft toothed edges, makes a mid-sized to tall houseplant. Also available in a 'Ming' variety with tightly curled leaves. Bright indoor light.
- **Ferns** - Many types are used indoors, usually grown in small containers or hanging baskets. Maidenhair, Boston, and asparagus ferns are popular choices; medium to dark green leaves that do well in moderate to bright light. Especially interesting are staghorn ferns - huge individual leaves, grow on a board or vertical structure, not a container.
- **Ficus** - There are many figs used as houseplants. Benjamin ficus is the most common, with long-leaved types like 'Alii' and large leaf types (fiddle leaf and rubber plant) also being popular. Ficus are tolerant of poor conditions, and make a nice tree form plant inside the home. Prune the plant as necessary to control size. Moderate to bright light.
- **Hedera ivy** - Dark green or variegated white-green leaves on a trailing plant, makes a great hanging plant, good for low to bright light.
- **Money tree** - Grown traditionally for good fortune! Money trees can become quite large over time, with a palm-shaped leaf with individual leaflets. Often sold in braided forms, where several plants have their trunks braided to grow together from an early age. Use in moderate to bright light.
- **Palms** - A number of palms grow well inside the home, 'Majesty' and 'Neanthe Bella' are common choices. Upright foliage grows well in bright indoor light.

- **Philodendron** - Grows in an enormous variety of leaf shapes and sizes, some philodendrons are climbing/trailing (we've seen these easily twenty feet long!), and some have an upright form. All are easy to grow plants that do well in moderate light.
- **Pothos ivy** - Pothos climbs and trails, and is used both as an upright plant on a support structure, as well as in hanging baskets and spillover containers. Can be grown in almost any light condition, tolerant of low light areas. Golden pothos is the most common, also available in mostly green and white/green coloration. Use greener varieties in the lowest light conditions for the best results. An excellent air purifier. (One of the few acceptable interior room plants for very low light conditions.)
- **Prayer plant**- Likes high light exposure and moist but not soggy soil. Prayer plants have large patterned leaves with hues of red, green, brown, and cream. These leaves lift up every evening and fold together as if they are praying and open again the next morning
- **Rubber plant** - Prefers high light exposure and to be kept slightly dry. This plant has leaves that are a dark green with red highlights that are 5"-12" long.
- **Schefflera** - Easy care mid-sized to large plant with rounded green leaves. Does best in moderate light.
- **Spathiphyllum (Peace lily)** - One of the best air cleaning plants around, dark green leaves on a small to mid-sized plant. Also called "closet plant" because of its tolerance for low light. Will bloom in moderate light, making a pretty white flower.
- **Swedish ivy** - A hanging plant that grows well in low to moderate light, round toothed leaves, trails nicely in baskets.
- **Tradescantia (Wandering jew)** - Several types are commonly grown, from small green-leaved types to larger purple-stripped colors, makes a good hanging basket or small container plant. Grow in moderate to bright light for the best color, especially with purple-marked types.

Succulent/Dry Plants

All of the following are best in a dry soil condition; will use half or less the water of a typical houseplant:

- **Aloe vera** - Succulent pointed leaves grow best in moderate to bright light. The type of plant that every home should have at least one of for medicinal use; good for use on cuts, scrapes, and burns.
- **Cacti and succulents (string of pearls, etc.)** - All cacti and similar succulents need to be kept extremely dry, watered no more than every two to four weeks depending upon your home's conditions. Don't touch cactus needles even if they look soft! Bright light.
- **Desert Rose (Ademium)** - High light exposure, does well in temperatures 60 degrees and above, so try to keep away from cold drafts. Needs to be completely dried out before watering. Can grow to be 2-5 feet tall when kept indoors, and blooms beautifully, in shades of red, white, pink, and rose.
- **Hoya** - Waxy leaves on trailing runners; available in green and variegated colors, grows in most light conditions but can bloom beautifully if it's in very bright indirect light.
- **Jade plant** - Rounded, thick leaves growing on fleshy stems; best in moderate to bright light.
- **Ponytail "palm"** - not really a palm, has a tassel of palm-like leaves on a thick base. Bright light.
- **Sansevieria (Mother-in-law's tongue)** - Mid-size upright plant with long, broad, strap-like leaves that emerge and grow straight up. Fine in most light conditions and one of the best for low light areas.
- **"ZZ" plant** - *Zamioculcas zamiifolia* is commonly known as "ZZ" plant. A rich, dark green set of leaves come forth from fleshy stems on a mid-sized, slow growing houseplant. Easy to care for, this plant likes drier soil and will tolerate most light conditions, although it's best grown in bright light. Good for folks who don't have a lot of time to devote to their plants, but still want greenery.

Flowering Plants:

The following plants need bright indoor light for the best color. Not direct sunlight, as it can burn or distort the growth of the plants, but bright light.

- **African violet** - The classic indoor flowering plant, many colors and leaves often variegated or show

purplish highlights; this plant needs to be watered around the top of the container or from the bottom of the pot to avoid excess moisture on the leaves. One of the easiest indoor blooming plants to grow. Self-watering pots are ideal!

- **Anthurium** - Colored spathes on dark green leafy plants, make sure the plant goes mostly dry for two months in winter to improve blooming next year.
- **Bromeliads** - Grown for their colorful inflorescences, will show exotic colors of yellow, pink, orange, and red. Each bromeliad will only bloom once, but the color will last for months; after the bloom is done, cut the browned bloom stalk off and wait. Almost every bromeliad species will produce "pups" from around the base, which can be separated when they reach 1/3 to 1/2 the size of the parent plant. These pups will bloom for you later!
- **Gloxinia** - A close relative of African violets, much larger (fewer) individual blooms on plants grown under the same conditions as African violets. Care and maintenance are identical.
- **Kalanchoe** - Blooming in a number of different colors, clusters of small flowers with succulent, fleshy foliage.
- **Orchids** - Often thought to be challenging plants to grow, they really aren't! Orchids need excellent drainage and are usually grown in a planting medium of large chunks of sphagnum moss, lava rock, and pine bark. Water orchids, on average, every 7-12 days, and make sure they never keep their feet wet for long! Tip all excess water out of the plant's saucer, or water it over the sink, never allowing the plant to sit in water. Orchids can bloom for months at a time, and when the last bloom on the spike fades, Phalaenopsis orchids can usually be coaxed to bloom again by counting up at least four nodes on the spike and cutting the spike slightly above this node - the plant will usually put on a secondary bloom from this cut. Once a bloom stem is finished, cut the stem short, and just be patient - the orchid will bloom again, but will take quite a while to put on a new spike (months to a year).
- **Rex Begonia** – Grown primarily for their beautifully patterned leaves. Blooms are pretty, but infrequent. Prefers to be fertilized at low rates frequently—fertilizing at half strength twice as often is better because strong fertilizer concentrations can burn the edges of the leaves.

Some of our Favorite Houseplants



African Violet



Airplane Plant



Anthurium



Bromeliad



Calathea



Croton



Dieffenbachia



Dracaena



Fiddle Leaf Ficus



Jade Plant



Kalanchoe



Maiden Hair Fern



Orchid



Ponytail Palm



Prayer Plant



Rex Begonia



Rubber Plant



Sansevieria



Spathiphyllum



ZZ Plant