



Our helpful guide to
HOUSEPLANTS



DUCHY *of* CORNWALL
NURSERY



Houseplants in their many forms breathe life into interiors. It's been proven that the addition of plants in the house creates a sense of well-being and also adds humidity to dry, centrally-heated homes in winter.



Some plants are even said to clean pollutants from the air, including Ivy, Pothos and Snake plants. Not only do indoor plants provide health benefits, they make a house a home.

The key to good plant parenting is to try and recreate the plants natural environment as much as possible e.g. light, water, humidity. Most species grown as houseplants are adaptable and do very well in conditions provided in modern homes. Some species like a little bit more humidity and grow very well as terrarium subjects.



LIGHT

Light is the first factor to consider when finding the right spot for your new houseplant.

The balance of water and light is essential for your plant to thrive. Very few plants can survive with no light at all. If you have a room with no natural light, it is possible to grow a plant with low-medium light requirements with the help of a fluorescent light, this needs to be on for around 12-14 hours to be effective. North facing windows get no direct sunlight and are suitable for low light plants. East facing windows get morning sun; this is optimum for most houseplants. South facing windows get sun all day and west facing windows get afternoon sun; this is when the sun is strongest.



WATERING

It is always best to water in the morning with tepid water.

Rainwater is best but in soft water areas tap water is fine. If your water is heavily chlorinated, fill your watering can ahead of time to allow the water to de-chlorinate. For most plants, allowing the top inch or two of compost to dry out before watering the plant again is ideal. Check this by pushing your finger into the compost to feel for moisture. Lifting the pot to check its weight will also give you an indicator of how much water the compost is holding and whether it's time to water.

When in doubt, wait another day!



WATERING DEPENDS ON VARIOUS FACTORS:

1/ How much light is the plant getting?

For example, Sansevierias can tolerate both low light levels and full sun but will need much less water if grown in low light, than if placed in a sunny window.

2/ What are the watering needs of the plant?

Plants adapted to arid conditions, e.g. cacti and succulents, need less water because they store water in their leaves and stems. Tropical plants usually have a large leaf surface area so lose more water through transpiration and are adapted to moist environments; these plants will require more water. Ferns prefer to stay evenly moist.

3/ What time of year is it?

Light levels in the winter are much lower than in summer so watering should be reduced. Think photosynthesis! Carbon dioxide + Water + Sunlight = Energy (carbohydrates). This chemical reaction drives plant growth so naturally, if there is less light there is less growth and the plant uses less water.

4/ Potting mix - how free draining is the potting mix?

For example, orchids are often potted into coir which is very moisture retentive. Water sparingly until you re-pot into bark, which is more free-draining and will allow the roots to dry out more quickly. For plants potted into compost, the addition of bark or perlite creates a more free-draining mix.

5/ Container material?

Plants planted in terracotta will dry out more quickly than plants in plastic pots because terracotta is porous.

It is important when you are watering to ensure the compost is evenly moist, but not wet. Water until water comes out of the drainage holes, but don't allow plants to sit in water for long periods of time.

REPOTTING

Spring and early summer is the best time to repot houseplants because they are actively growing new roots.

Check the roots of your plant to see if it needs repotting. If they are emerging from the drainage holes, it's time to repot. Some plants are more vigorous than others and will need repotting every year e.g. *Monstera deliciosa*, *Rhaphidophora tetrasperma*. Others may only need repotting every two years e.g. *Peperomia*, orchids. If your plant is pot-bound, it is a good idea to prune the roots and tease them out to encourage new roots to grow into the fresh potting soil. If the plant is a slow-grower, prefers to be slightly pot-bound, or you would like to restrict growth; you may wish to place the plant back into the same pot with fresh compost, rather than go up a size. Many houseplants can be divided to create more plants if desired.

There are speciality potting mixes for houseplants including cacti and succulents. If you have a larger collection or just prefer to make your own, a well-draining mix of multi-purpose compost with added bark is usually sufficient. For plants that require extra drainage e.g. *Peperomia* and succulents, incorporate perlite into the mix. For a great boost, try adding a handful of worm castings to your potting mix. It's full of growth-stimulating nutrients such as nitrogen and magnesium as well as beneficial microbes and enzymes.



HUMIDITY

Most houseplants originate from the tropics and love humidity.

Central heating and air conditioning dry the air and reduce the humidity levels which can cause unsightly, brown leaves. Humidity levels can be increased by grouping plants together, keeping your plants properly watered, misting regularly and placing plants on a pebble tray filled with water.



FEEDING

Feeding is a necessity for containerised plants because they have no access to nutrients once the compost is depleted.

Repotting into fresh compost will be enough for a few weeks, depending on the compost you use. Regular feeding is vital for healthy plant growth and resilience against pests and diseases. Liquid feeds are the most efficient way of feeding your plants. Feed only when the plant is actively growing in spring and summer, once a fortnight. Never feed carnivorous plants. Bromeliads should rarely need feeding, once a year in spring would be sufficient. For slow-growers like *Peperomia*, feed with a ¼ strength houseplant feed once a month in the growing season.

PRUNING

Pruning is done for a few reasons, firstly to take out any dead, diseased or damaged parts of the plant and secondly to encourage bushy growth and a nice shape.

Prune back to just above a node, this is where new growth will emerge from. You can remove dead leaves at any time of the year, but pruning to create a good shape should only be done during the growing season. Pruning will also encourage branching, perfect for fiddle leaf figs and rubber plants, which are usually available with a single stem. Where you make the cut is where the new growth will form. Always use sterile secateurs.



PESTS AND DISEASES



Common HOUSEPLANT PESTS AND TREATMENTS

MEALY BUG – are white bugs which lay their eggs in cotton wool-like masses. Due to their waxy coating they are difficult to eradicate. Dabbing methylated spirit or isopropanol on them is the best way to eliminate these pests and should be done weekly until you are confident they have completely gone. Check in leaf sheaths and in crevices because they like to hide!

APHIDS – love soft new growth in spring; this causes distorted new growth, weakens the plant and can spread viruses. The best course of action is a soap spray; you can make your own with a weak solution of washing up liquid in a spray bottle. Insecticidal soap sprays and Neem oil are also suitable. Chemical sprays should only be used as a last resort and never when a plant is in flower.

FUNGUS GNATS OR SCIARID FLIES – or sciarid flies, as they are also known, are small brown flies that lay their eggs on the surface of the compost. They aren't harmful to the plant but are a nuisance. They love wet soil so make sure you allow your plants to dry out a little between waterings. Adding a layer of grit, sand, pebbles or bark on top of the compost will also stop the flies from being able to lay their eggs, interrupting their life-cycle.

It is important to check plants regularly so you catch infestation early and separate plants to prevent spreading.

Check underneath the leaves and in crevices, as well as the potting mix. A sure sign that your plant has a sap-sucking pest is the presence of honeydew, a black sticky substance on the leaves.



SCALE INSECTS – are sap-sucking insects that attach to leaves and stems. These pests are crawling insects until they settle and insert their mouth-parts. Then, they lose the use of their legs and produce a dome-shaped shell. Symptoms include yellowing and wilting of the leaves. To treat, scrape off or dab with Isopropanol. Insecticidal soap can be used in the crawler stage.

RED SPIDER MITE – is a sap-sucker that causes a pale mottling on leaves and can eventually kill your plant. These mites like dry conditions so ensuring your plants are correctly watered and have adequate humidity is a good preventative measure. To treat red spider mite use a soapy solution and wipe the insects from the leaves. For very heavy infestations a systemic pesticide may be used, but only as a last resort.



WEEKLY JOBS

CHECK

the health of your plants, look underneath the leaves for pests and check for signs of disease.

ROTATE

your plants regularly if the light source is coming from one direction, this will prevent your plants becoming lopsided.

SPRAY

your plants with SB Plant Invigorator once a week. This useful product is a foliar feed and acts as a preventative for pests and diseases.

CLEAN

the leaves with a cloth and warm water with a tiny amount of washing up liquid regularly to avoid dust building up and reducing photosynthesis.



ORCHIDS



Orchids have a reputation for being difficult but if you follow one or two simple rules they are very easy to care for. Firstly place your plant away from cold draughts, in indirect light and not above a radiator.

Also, keep away from bananas! (Bananas release ethylene gas when ripening which makes the flowers wilt). Phalaenopsis can tolerate low light; a north or east-facing window would be fine.

For Phalaenopsis orchids, it is very simple to determine their watering needs. These orchids are grown in clear pots so you will be able to see how wet the roots are. Green roots are sufficiently damp and as they turn silvery-white, the plant will require watering. Use tepid water and allow the water to drain completely and then place back into its decorative pot. Every other time you water the plant, add some orchid food.

Once the flowers on your orchid have faded there are two options; you can either cut the flower spike back to 3mm above the next node down. This will encourage the development of a new flower spike from the node; however the flowers may be smaller. The second option is to remove the flower spike completely, cutting it a few centimetres from the base of the flower spike. It will take longer to produce more flowers but the new flower spike will be a nicer shape. Don't forget to stake when the spike is approximately 30cm tall.

If your orchid hasn't re-bloomed it may not be getting enough light so you should move it to a brighter position. Often, if you provide a greater difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures this can trigger a new flower spike to develop.



Orchids like to be fairly tight in their pots. However, if your orchid is climbing out of its pot or if the bark has broken down it is time to re-pot your orchid. An ideal time to do this would be when the orchid has finished flowering and when the roots are actively growing (growing roots have a green tip). Re-potting is done by removing the orchid from its pot and carefully removing the old bark from the roots. Sterile secateurs or scissors should be used to remove old or damaged roots (healthy roots are firm and white or green) and healthy roots can be shortened to a minimum of 10cm.

The plant can be re-potted into the same pot or a slightly larger one if necessary, using specialist orchid bark. Hold the plant in a central position at the correct level and fill the pot with bark, firmly but carefully pressing bark around the roots to anchor the plant in the pot. Spray the surface of the compost with water regularly to encourage the growth of new roots but do not water until a week after re-potting to avoid fungal problems.



AIR PLANTS

Most air plants originate from tropical regions; this means that they require a minimum of 10°C. Tillandsias hang on tree branches in the wild so usually get bright, filtered light.



CACTI AND SUCCULENTS



Cacti and succulents are from arid areas such as deserts and rocky areas. To recreate these growing conditions they need as much light as you can give them, especially cacti because they will stretch towards the light.

This can be replicated at home by placing your plant in an east facing window, or a south/west facing window with diffused light. Avoid north-facing windows unless you have a shade-loving species e.g. *Tillandsia albertiana*.

Air plants are very easy to maintain. When the plant is dry it will look silver and when it is wet it will appear green. When it is dry, you can either mist it with a hand mister or dunk in lukewarm water for 30 minutes or so. Make sure water doesn't sit in the base of the plant because it will rot, place it upside down to dry. In the spring and summer months water more frequently, reduce watering in the winter. To feed, add a small amount of orchid or houseplant feed to the water when you are watering. This can be done once a month in the summer when it is actively growing, do not feed in the winter when it is not actively growing. And last but by no means least; ensure your air plant has sufficient air movement, don't place in closed terrariums.

This means placing your plant close to a south or west-facing window. Water cacti sparingly, this is approximately every two weeks in summer and not at all in winter (given the correct light). Succulents such as *Echeveria* need watering when their lower leaves become soft. Make sure water doesn't sit in the rosette because this can cause rot. These plants aren't heavy feeders so feed once a month in spring and summer with a specialist cactus feed or a very weak houseplant feed (1/4 strength). Don't feed in the winter when the plants are dormant. Repotting is always done in spring and only when the plant is pot-bound. Go up one pot size and use a gritty, free-draining mix.

LITHOPS

Lithops or 'Living Stones' as they are also known due to their pebble-like appearance, are members of the Mesemb family. They mostly originate from rocky terrain in South Africa, where they experience summer rains and dry winters. They are succulents and are easy to grow so long as you follow a set of specific requirements, particularly with their watering cycle.



Lithops produce daisy-like flowers once a year between December and July, depending on the species, which last for a few weeks. Sometime after flowering has occurred, a new pair of leaves will push up through the existing pair of leaves and the old leaves will shrivel and dry. This is the time to stop watering until the old leaves have completely shrivelled. Resume watering when the new leaves are fully formed.

Most Lithops species require a minimum temperature of 5°C so a frost-free glasshouse, cool room or conservatory would be ideal. They require a bright, sunny spot such as an east-facing window where they get 4 hours of direct morning sun, to avoid elongation. Prevent plenty of ventilation and protect from hot afternoon sun to avoid scorching.

Feed occasionally during the growing season with a low nitrogen liquid feed.

PLANT GUIDE

Plants that like



DIRECT SUNLIGHT

(unblocked south and west-facing windows):



- Cacti and Succulents
- Sansevieria*
- ZZ plant
- Hibiscus*
- Beaucarnea recurvata*
- Bougainvillea*
- Strelitzia reginae* and *Strelitzia nicolai*
- Citrus plants
- Tibouchina urvilleana*
- Ananas comosus* (Pineapple plant)

BRIGHT, INDIRECT LIGHT

(unblocked south and west-facing windows):

- Peperomia*
- Ficus elastica* (Rubber plant)
- Tillandsia* (Air plant)
- Tradescantia*
- Ficus lyrata*
- Hoya*
- Areca palms*
- Pilea*
- Orchids*
- Raphidophora tetrasperma*
- Alocasia*

PLANT GUIDE

Plants that are suitable for



LOW LIGHT AND LOW NIGHT-TIME TEMPERATURES

(unheated conservatory or porch in part shade/shade)

- Fatsia japonica*
- Asplenium x 'Parvati'*
- Asparagus ferns*
- Asplenium nidus*
- Asplenium bulbiferum*
- Pteris cretica*
- Cyrtomium falcatum*

HIGH LIGHT AND LOW NIGHT-TIME TEMPERATURE

(unheated conservatory or porch in full sun)

- Cycas revoluta*
- Some cacti eg. *Echinocereus*, *Opuntia*, *Rebutia*, *Orocereus*
- Semi-hardy succulents, such as *Aeoniums*, *Echeveria*, *Sempervivums* and *Aloe humilis*, *Jasmine polyanthemum*
- Araucaria heterophylla* (Norfolk island pine)
- Citrus* and *Pelargoniums*

LOW/MEDIUM LIGHT

(No direct sunlight, north facing windows/east-facing window with a light diffuser e.g. net, other plants):

- Schefflera arboricola*
- Kentia palms*
- Aglaonema*
- Dieffenbachia*
- Most indoor ferns, particularly Boston ferns
- Calathea/Maranta* (Prayer plants)
- Chlorophytum comosum*
- Some *Philodendron* species including *P. scandens*
- Fittonia*
- Carnivorous plants
- Nepenthes*
- Bromeliads*
- Monstera deliciosa*
- Monstera adansonii*
- Ficus benjamina*
- Rhipsalis* (Jungle cacti)
- Crassula ovata*

VERY LOW LIGHT

(no natural light, plants placed a distance from any windows):

It is worth noting that although the following plants will survive/tolerate these lighting conditions, growth will be very slow. It is important to water these plants sparingly.

- Philodendron scandens*
- Aspidistra elatior*
- Sansevierias* (Mother in-laws tongue)
- Zamioculcus zamifolia* (ZZ plant)
- Spathiphyllum wallisii* (Peace lily)
- Epipremnum aureum/Scindapsis*
- Hedera helix*
- Draceana*
- Chamaedorea elegans* (Parlour palm)



BATHROOMS

Bathrooms are humid places, but the temperature can fluctuate rapidly. Here are some plants which will cope with this situation:

- Aspidistra elatior* (Cast iron plant)
- Cissus rhombifolia*
- Philodendron scandens*
- Adiantum* (Maidenhair ferns)
- Saxifraga stolonifera*
- Helexine* (Mind your own business)
- Monstera deliciosa*
- Tillandsia cyanea*

TOP 5 HOUSEPLANTS

for

FORGETFUL INDOOR GARDENERS

- N° 1/ *Sansevieria* (Snake plants)
- N° 2/ *Zamioculcus zamifolia* (ZZ plant)
- N° 3/ *Cacti*
- N° 4/ *Aspidistra elatior*
- N° 5/ *Spathiphyllum wallisii* (Peace lily)



a few essential HOUSEPLANT TOOLS



MISTER

Useful for creating humidity around plants, foliar feeding and spraying pests.



SECATEURS

Useful for pruning and propagation. Sterilise regularly with isopropanol to avoid cross-contamination.



GLOVES

Protect hands from dirt and injury, particularly from spiny plants!



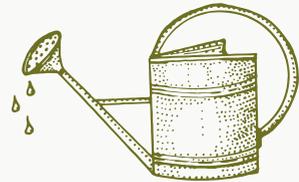
KNIFE

A useful tool for propagation. A knife can also be helpful for stubborn plants that don't want to leave their pots!



LITTLE SPADE

A little spade is a handy tool when you are planting up a terrarium, even a spoon will do the trick. It is also helpful when repotting plants for scooping up potting mix.



WATERING CAN

This is an essential piece of kit for the plant parent. A small watering can will give you extra control when watering your indoor plants; you will also need a watering can for liquid feeding.

Ask the nursery team for lots more handy hints and information.

**DUCHY of CORNWALL
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