

WINTER CARE FOR INDOOR PLANTS

Houseplants, just like other plants are keenly aware that wintertime has arrived. You might notice them looking a little stressed and even losing a few leaves. It is true that the needs of houseplants change during the winter period so here are a few tips that will help keep houseplants happy until spring arrives.

The winter period causes growth of indoor plants to slow down dramatically. There is much less sunlight intensity in addition to short days and much lower levels of indoor humidity. These factors require a change in how we care for these plants.

Watering

It is important to water appropriately. Avoid over-watering, which is one of the most common causes of plant decline and death indoors. Most plants benefit when the soil is given time to dry between each watering. This ensures enough oxygen for plant roots. Many plants can actually be allowed to wilt just a little to provide the signal that water is needed.

It is also important to water thoroughly. Every plant needs a continuous supply of water in the correct amounts. Often potting materials become difficult to saturate with water (hydrophobic) when they dry out, resulting in water just running right through the pot and out of the root zone. It may be necessary to place the entire container in a sink and slowly saturate the potting soil multiple times. This will ensure consistent moisture. Then allow the pot to drain before putting in back in its place. It will then be important to allow proper time for the soil to dry before watering again.

Watering frequency will be reduced during the winter period, so don't rush to water the plant again too soon. Monitor plants carefully. Once the top inch of soil is dry or the plant shows slight signs of wilting, it is time to water once again.

Fertilizer

With little to no growth occurring during winter, houseplants require very little fertilizer. For flowering plants the rate should be no more than half the normal rate and for most foliage plants one-quarter the normal rate. Fertilizing can be stopped all together if there is no new growth. In general November to February is the time to hold off on fertilizing houseplants.

Burned or dried leaf margins can be a sign of root damage caused by salt build-up in the soil from fertilization. If this happens it is important to leach to soil to remove excess salt. Use an amount of water at least 2 times the volume of the container to flush the soil. It is recommended to leach houseplants every 4-6 months preferably before applying fertilizer so as to avoid losing what was just applied.

Humidity

If possible keep the humidity levels up in the home. Winter is a very dry time especially with heating systems running full blast. A humidifier or steaming pot on the stove can be of great benefit to houseplants this time of year.

Location

Finally, make sure that plants are in a place where they are receiving the brightest indirect light available. A window on the south or east makes a good place. In considering locations for houseplants remember that contact with cold windows and drafts from doors and vents should be avoided.