

Fact Sheet 98-91



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Watering: This is probably the most important part of plant care. Too much as well as too little water can kill a plant. That is why it is necessary to know the plant and its requirements. It is wise to use room temperature bottled water or water taken from the tap. Do not use water that has been run through a water softener. A good rule of thumb is to water your plants when the soil feels dry an inch below the top. Check plants in larger pots weekly and smaller pots more often. Use your finger or a pencil to do this. Clay pots are porous and plants in them will need watering more often than the ones in plastic and ceramic containers. The simplest way to water is at the kitchen sink. Water from the top and allow the water to run through the root system and out the bottom of the pot. Do this at least three times.

Never allow your plants to sit in the water as this can cause root rot. Add 1 teaspoon of vinegar to a gallon of water once a month or so to eliminate salt build up and to lower the pH of the water.



Light: All plants must have light to manufacture food and to grow. Plants will grow long, weak stems and pale leaves if light is insufficient. They may not flower (if a flowering plant) and will eventually die. However, always take into account that the plants' light needs vary as with other requirements. Films and screens on windows help save energy by diminishing the amount of light let in.

Fertilizing: Allow new plants to adjust to their new environment at least a month before fertilizing. Give newly potted plants time to grow new roots to absorb the fertilizer you are going to apply. Use any powdered, liquid or tablet fertilizer specifically designed for houseplants. The best ones are those that have their nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium in a 1-2-1 ratio. For example, a fertilizer marked 5-10-5 or 10-20-10 on the package is ideal. Actually, the best time to fertilize is when they are in active growth such as during the spring and summer. Fertilizing of most houseplants is done to maintain the plant and not to produce fast growth.

Air: Plants need air, just as we do, for both their roots and their leaves. Use a fork to aerate if the plant is in a plastic pot. Poke the fork about a half-inch into the soil to avoid damaging roots. Always work from the outer rim to the center. Remember, live plants filter the air and provide a healthy place to live and work.

Humidity: This is very important to every houseplant. Remember that many of these plants grow in the tropics. The closer we come to approximating their natural habitat, the better they'll grow. Occasionally, use a sprayer bottle to mist your plants.

Grooming: Plants absorb light and air through their leaves. Cleaning the foliage not only improves their appearance, but also helps the plants to live. Keep your plants well groomed by snipping off all dead leaves and by pruning when necessary.