

Houseplant Checklist

By Michelle.Tako

Selection

- Assess your light** Know if the location for your plant receives bright, partial or low light.
- Read the tag** Plants usually have a care tag that will give information on required light, water and growth patterns.
- Look at the leaves** Before buying, look the plant over carefully. Examine the leaves for holes, insects, yellow or brown leaves, wilted or dead leaves. Pass up plants that look unhealthy.
- Check the drainage holes** If the roots of the plant are growing out the drainage holes, the plant is root-bound and needs to be re-potted in a larger container. If the mass of roots is very large, the plant might be in poor health and not survive transplanting.
- Smell the soil** Potting soil should have an earthy smell, not sour or unpleasant. There should not be insects, fungus or white crusts on the soil.

Regular care

- Water when slightly dry** Check your plants daily by feeling the surface of the soil. Don't wait until all the soil is dry and the plant wilts.
- Water sufficiently** When watering, slowly pour in water until it runs out the drainage holes of the pot. This thoroughly soaks the soils, and encourages healthy root growth.
- Tepid water** Water with tepid or slightly cool water. Very cold water can shock the plant's roots.
- Fertilize** Feed your plants with a fertilizer specifically formulated for houseplants once per week spring through fall. Follow package directions for application, and don't assume more fertilizer is better.
- Tidy up your plant** Remove dead leaves by clipping with a scissor.
- Rotate the container** Each week, turn your the container one quarter around. This will keep the plant growing straight, without bending towards the light source.
- Keep pots above water** Don't let your plant sit in a tray full of water. The roots will rot.
- Do use pebbles** If your home is very dry, you can increase humidity by placing pebbles in the drainage tray, and moistening them with water. Make sure the pot is above the water level.
- Mist** You can increase humidity and freshen leaves by misting your plants with room temperature water.
- Wash leaves** Rinse your plant's leaves off in the sink occasionally to remove dust, or wipe with a wet cloth.
- Prune** Most houseplants need little pruning, but if your plant is getting too large or has an awkward shape, use a clipper to gently trim back to desired size.
- Transplant** If your plant is large in its pot, and starts growing roots through the drainage holes, it is time to move it to a larger container.

Problems

- Insects** Check your plant for insects weekly. Common houseplant pests include mealy bugs, spider mites, scale and fungus gnats. Pests can be treated with insecticide formulated for houseplant use.
- Disease** Most houseplant diseases are caused by over-watering. Watch for gray powder on the leaves, mushy or wilted stems, dropping leaves or a sour smell. These are signs of fungal infection, which can be difficult to treat. You can try a fungicide spray, but the plant may not recover.
- Sunburn** Plants kept too near a heat source can develop brown, crispy spots on the leaves. Move to a cooler location.
- Under-watering** Signs of under-watering include very dry soil, wilting leaves and eventual death and drying of leaves.
- Cold temperatures** Plants that are exposed to cold temperatures may develop yellow or brown leaf edges, or drop leaves. Move to a warmer spot.