

# 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.