


Drake's Houseplant Guide





Light, Water, Maintenance, and Common Pests. This guide covers the most important basics for growing thriving houseplants.

LIGHT

Considering the natural lighting of your home is a great place to start when buying houseplants. For example, north-facing windows never see the sun's rays. East-facing windows provide mellow morning sun while southern windows offer bright reflective light throughout the day. For sun-loving plants including cacti and succulents, west-facing windows provide direct afternoon light.


 **Low-light** tolerant plants can survive in a room where a book can be read with the lights off. Low-light rooms usually have north-facing windows or windows with obstructing views. Plants in this category include *Dracaena trifasciata*, *Zamioculcas zamiifolia*, and *Aglaonema*.


 **Medium-light** plants thrive in rooms with east and south-facing windows. Some of these plants can sit 4-5 feet away from west or south-facing windows, if they have a clear view of the sky. Great medium light plants include *Philodendrons*, *Ficus*, and *Schefflera*.


 **Medium-light to bright-light** plants will thrive 2-3 feet from west-facing windows and prefer direct afternoon sun. Here in the pacific northwest this is the best location for cacti and succulents.

WATERING

Feeling the soil before you water, and watering thoroughly is key! During the spring and summer your tropical plants and ferns will likely need water weekly, but be sure to always check the soil first! Check for moisture by feeling an inch down into the soil for tropical plants, a half-inch for ferns, and for cacti and succulents the soil should be *completely dry* all the way through before watering. If your plant is moist to the touch refrain from watering and check it again the following week.

 **Check twice a week** – Most ferns, and carnivorous plants. Some plants in this category prefer water from a tray below. Talk with your local nursery staff about how to care for carnivorous plants and maiden hair ferns.

 **Check weekly** – Most tropical plants, including *Pothos*, *Philodendrons*, *Ficus* and *Anthuriums*. If the soil is still moist it is best to let these plants dry out further.

 **Check bi-weekly** – Drought tolerant Cacti, Succulents, *Dracena trifasciata*, *Zamioculcas zamiifolia*. Do not water these indoor plants if they show *any* sign of moisture. They may only need water once a month!

When you water your plant, *water thoroughly* making sure to cover the entire surface area. Water until the pot drains. You can do this twice if the plant is in a porous pot and is placed outside to drain. **Pots should always have drainage and a tray to capture excess water if watered indoors.** This keeps the plant's roots from sitting in standing water which will cause rot. If you do have a pot without drainage, we

recommend nesting the nursery pot of the plant into the container rather than transplanting.

MAINTENANCE

Up-potting and fertilizing are important practices in maintaining the health and longevity of indoor plants.

A plant will need to be repotted when the roots have begun to press around the sides of the pot, or grow out of the drainage hole of the pot. To replant, lightly tease the roots, and plant into a pot roughly two inches wider in diameter and depth to prevent root rot.

An organic potting soil is great for most houseplants, but if you are replanting cacti or succulents be sure to use a well-draining cactus mix.

Fertilizing your indoor plants can make a huge difference in the spring and summer. Use an organic fertilizer with an NPK of 3-3-3 or below. Dilute fertilizer further for cacti and succulents.

COMMON PESTS

Pests are usually a sign that a plant is experiencing stress from lack of light or improper watering. Plants, like people, need to be in good health to ward off infections.

The most common houseplant pests include mealybugs, spider mites, fungus gnats, aphids, thrips and scale. Treatments can be very effective as long as the bugs are detected quickly. Many of these pests are extremely vigilant and are hard to defeat once they've spread.

Pests continued... 

Checking for pests weekly can save you from having to treat your *entire* collection of house plants for weeks due to an undetected pest!

When watering take extra time to look the plant over for any possible infection. Knowing a few of their favorite hiding spots will give you the ability to check quickly prevent large outbreaks.



The most common forms of treatment include foliar spray, and systemic mixes. It is best to use organic sprays and solutions. Systemic mixes (usually powder) can be added straight to the soil and watered in. This treatment boosts the plants defenses as it is absorbed through the roots and makes the plant itself lethal to unwanted guests.



Mealybug is a fuzzy white insect that leaches nutrients from the plants leaves, stems, and any nook and cranny it can fit itself into. Dabbing the insect

with a cotton swab soaked in rubbing alcohol is the best form of topical treatment. Treat mealy every three days for nine days, and be sure to give your plant a good rinse if alcohol is left on the leaves or stems. After the mealy has cleared up, be sure to check the plant for any new outbreaks over the next several weeks.



Spider mites are a lot smaller and can spread *very quickly* if not stopped early enough. You can usually find them hiding in small

webbing on the underside of leaves, down the

leaf's center or midrib and between petioles (where the leaf and stem meet.) The infected plant should be treated twice a week for 3 to 4 weeks. These bugs can be taken care of with an organic foliar spray specifically for spider mites, or a systemic treatment. This pest is common among Scheffleras and Calatheas.



Fungus gnats are tiny flies that favor damp soil. The larva of this pest is the real predator as it feeds on roots beneath the soil. To kill the larvae make

sure to let the infected plant's soil dry several inches deep. Larvae cannot survive without moisture. To get rid of the pesky flies, set a small sticky trap on the surface of the soil. By allowing the soil to dry and using a sticky trap the flies should dissipate in roughly 2 weeks.



Aphids normally appear on the plant's leaves and stems. These bugs come in a variety of different colors including green, white, yellow and black.

Aphids reproduce quickly and can infest your plant within a few days. Spray these pests with insecticidal soap, or hose off the foliage until the bugs are dislodged.



Scale is a hard-bodied insect that sucks sap from the veins and stems plants. Due to its protective shell this bug is relatively hard to kill.

Like most pests if caught early enough the

infected plant can recover quickly. These bugs can be removed with a soft brush or by hand. Systemic treatment can aid in the defense as long as the infestation is minor. These pests are persistent, so check your plant for several weeks after removal for any new outbreak.



Thrips like fungus gnats, are the most damaging to plants while in the larva phase. These larvae however, favor the foliage of the plant. *Monstera*

deliciosa and various philodendrons are the most susceptible, leaving the leaves blotchy and discolored. Use insecticidal soap weekly until the larvae are gone. The discoloration is permanent and any scarred leaves should be pruned.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

While this guide covers basic houseplant care, you will have greater success by taking the time to research your specific plant and environment.

These are some outstanding sites and links regarding houseplants and care;

www.houseplant411.com

<https://blog.leonandgeorge.com/posts/plant-light-requirements>

<https://extension.umd.edu/hqic/topics/indoor-plant-care>