HEALTHY HOUSEPLANTS

**SELECTION**

- Look for plants that have young growth, new flowers or leaf buds, and healthy foliage.
- Avoid plants that are leggy or appear to have insects or disease.
- Select plants that are suitable for the area you have available for them. Most indoor plants prefer a controlled, constant temperature of 65 to 75 degrees during the day. Be sure to rotate the containers every few days so all sides of the plants receive sunlight. East- or west-facing windows are usually a good choice since full sun exposure can burn some plants.
- Natural light is not essential since you can grow healthy plants under fluorescent or LED lights. Most plants need some darkness to support healthy growth so should have light no more than 16 hours per day.
- Normal room temperature is fine for most plants.

**CARE**

- It is best not to water on a schedule but to water when the plant is dry to the touch or the weight of the pot feels light. Watering from the bottom prevents or minimizes salt build-up. Normal tap water is fine but contains chemicals like salt and chlorine. Distilled water is better. If salt builds up you will see a crust on the top of the pot. You can clean this off and for large plants you can leach salts by flushing a large amount of water through the container about twice a year.
- Use fertilizer sparingly. A good choice is a slow-release indoor fertilizer that is specially formulated for houseplants.
- Plants love a summer vacation by being placed outside. Best to wait until mid-June to ensure warm night-time temperatures. Avoid sudden changes in the amount of light the plant receives. You may need to start in a shady location and gradually move the plant to a sunny spot if appropriate for the plant. You likely will need to water and fertilize more often. In the fall, you can reverse the process.
- Repot plants regularly, especially when roots stick out of the pot bottom. You can make your own potting soil by mixing equal parts of peat moss, vermiculite and perlite or use one of the good commercial potting soils. Some plants, such as African violets, orchids and cacti require special soil mixtures.
- Any type of pot—terra cotta, ceramic, plastic—can be used but make sure the pot has a drainage hole in the bottom. Do not put rocks in bottom of pot.

**SIGNS OF TROUBLE**

- Normally green leaves are turning yellow. Can be caused from too much or too little light, too much fertilizer or water.
- Tips of leaves are turning brown. Usually caused by too much or too little water or an overdose of fertilizer.
- Leaves have yellow or brown spots. Usually caused by too much sun or water.
- Base of stem is soft. Mushy stems are a classic symptom of overwatering.
- Dry, brittle leaves. These are a symptom of under-watering.
EASY HOUSEPLANTS TO CARE FOR

**Cast Iron Plant (Aspidistra elatior):** Prefers low light; grows in a clump. Leaves are sword-like, pointed, about 4” wide and 2’ long. Will occasionally flower indoors.

**Christmas Cactus (Zygocactus or Schlumbergera):** Produces deep pink or red flowers in early winter. Can handle low light but you’ll get more flowers in bright light. You can force it to bloom in December by keeping it in complete darkness for 12 hours a night beginning about mid-October, until buds appear.

**African Violets:** Plants are compact and free flowering with a wide variety of flower forms and colors. With careful watering, high humidity and bright (not direct) light, there can be blooms nearly all year round.

**Poinsettia:** Single most popular houseplant in the world, usually purchased around Christmas. Now come in pink, white, purple, yellow, orange and variegated colors along with the standard red.

**Peace Lilies (Spathiphyllum):** With folded white flowers nodding peacefully over glossy leaves. These tropical plants prefer filtered light, warmth and humidity.

**Begonia:** Flowering begonias are usually thought of as outdoor plants but also possess all the characteristics of a great indoor plant. They are tough, undemanding and free flowering.

**Kalanchoe:** Unassuming succulent plants that are easy to grow and bloom with clusters of small upright flowers. Most popular variety is *K. blossfeldiana*, a dependable bloomer in the spring, provided it is given bright light and adequate water. Follow the basic rules for growing succulents.

**Anthurium:** Boasts some of the most striking plants in the world, but the only one you are likely to find in an average gardening center is the *A. scherzerianum*. These plants have distinctive red flower structures that feature a heart-shaped red spathe from which emerges a white or yellow lower spike. They thrive on humidity, heat, ample water, bright light and rich soil.

**Hibiscus:** One of the most enduring symbols of the tropics. Flowers are available in single and double forms and in a dizzying array of colors. They insist on warmth, lots of light, and humidity, and they are prone to several varieties of bugs. Not the best plant for a beginner but a flowering hibiscus is a most remarkable sight in any temperate house.

**Spider Plant (Chlorophytum comosum):** Just keeps on giving. Often grown in hanging baskets. You almost never see a spider plant that doesn’t have babies attached. Will get 2 to 2-1/2 feet wide and 2 to 3 feet long. Dangling babies that start to form roots can be cut off and planted on their own.

**Pothos (Epipremnum):** One of the easiest houseplants to grow. Likes to dry out between waterings, but if left dry too long leaves will wilt and eventually dry and fall. Very tolerant of all types of light conditions. You can let them trail down or secure them to a support or trellis. Pruning will keep them fuller at the base.

**Other Suggestions:**

- Aloe (*Aloe sp. & hybrids*)
- Chinese Evergreen (*Aglaonema commutatum*)
- Dumb Cane (*Dieffenbachia sp.*)
- Parlor Palm (*Chamaedorea elegans*)
- Purple Heart (*Tradescantia pallida*)
- Jade Plant (*Crassula ovata*)
- Rubber Plant or Tree (*Ficus elastic*)
- Prayer Plant (*Maranta sp.*)
- Croton (*Codiaeum variegatum*)

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