

# Golden Rules of Houseplants

**DON'T DROWN THEM:** Roots need air as well as water. Keeping the soil soaked at all times means certain death for most plants. Water logging kills by preventing vital air getting to the roots and by encouraging root-rotting diseases. More plants die through overwatering than any other single cause; they are killed by kindness.

**GIVE THEM A REST:** Beginners are usually surprised to learn that nearly all plants need a rest in winter. This means less feeding and less heat than in the active growing period. Also make certain there are no drafts, as this can be fatal. If plants are close to a door choose a new winter location away from chilly temperatures.

**ACCEPT THE LOSS OF "TEMPORARY" PLANTS:** Some popular gift plants such as cyclamen, chrysanthemum, and gloxinia will die down in a matter of weeks. You've done nothing wrong; these types of flowering potted plants are only temporary residents.

**GIVE THEM EXTRA HUMIDITY:** The atmosphere of a centrally heated room in winter is as dry as desert air. Increase the air humidity by using a humidifier or placing plants in a moist area such as the kitchen or bathroom. You can mist the plants, grow pots in groups to increase the moisture surrounding plants or double pot the plant using an outer waterproof container and fill the space between the pot and the container with moist peat.

**TREAT TROUBLE PROMPTLY:** Expert or beginner, trouble will strike some time. One or two scale insects or mealy bugs are easily picked off; an infestation may be incurable. Overwatering is not fatal at first, but kills when prolonged. Learn to recognize the early signs of trouble.

**GROUP THEM TOGETHER:** Nearly all plants look better and grow better when grouped together. The standard group consist of four to twelve clay or plastic pots closely grouped together to produce a pleasing arrangement in which both shapes and tints are varied. In the most usual grouping, foliage plants are used to provide the permanent framework and flowering potted plants are used to provide splashes of color. The taller plants, the darker greens and the larger leaves are placed at the back of the group.

**LEARN TO REPOT:** After a year or two most plants begin to look sickly. In many cases the plant simply needs repotting into a larger container. The best time to repot is in the spring so that the roots will have plenty of time to become established before the onset of the resting season.

**CHOOSE WISELY:** The plant must be able to flourish in the home you have provided for it. Even the expert can't make a shade lover survive in a sunny window. After purchasing a plant, monitor the activity for the first few weeks and ensure the location is suitable.

**HAVE THE PROPER TOOLS:** Buy a watering can with a long, narrow spout and a mister for increasing humidity, reducing dust and controlling pests. You will need a reputable brand of soil and a collection of pots plus stakes and plant ties or string. Drip trays will keep furniture dry; a bottle liquid fertilizer and a safe pest killer will keep the plants looking healthy. To complete your tool kit, include a soft sponge, an old kitchen spoon and fork, and a pair of small sized pruners.

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**CHECK THE PLANT'S SPECIFIC NEEDS:** Look up the secrets of success in an A-Z guide for each plant. This will prove invaluable as you will detect problems, maintain healthy plants and realize what plant is best suited for a specific location.

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