

# UAF Indoor Plant Program - Plant Care Tips

Updated 10/21/19

- Position/location: Determine best light for the specific plant before placing.
- Rotate plants to avoid uneven growth; leaves are drawn to the light
- Keep plants away from drafts, ducted heat or A/C outlets
- Use only lukewarm/tepid water for watering plants and clippings
- PLEASE do not over water plants! Over watering is often the cause of disease or death to plants. Before watering, always meter to the plant roots where it really matters. Some plants require more watering in summer.
- To mist or not to mist? Contrary to lore, squirting foliage with water is not an efficient way to increase humidity for houseplants. A humidifier works better, or you can set the plant on a dish of pebbles and add just enough water to touch the bottom of the pot. Misting does, however, help keep leaves clean and fresh, and it's a good way to provide moisture to cuttings that are slowly developing new roots. Use soft water (water low in minerals) when misting, and make sure it's no cooler than room temperature. Mist in the morning whenever possible, and never mist plants that are exposed to full sun.
- Stake plants young/early so their spine/stock grows straight. Mature plants that aren't staked may require extreme pruning (separating plant head from roots). Transplanting without roots success rate is about 50/50; some do not root well in water
- Use plastic coated twist ties for securing plants to stakes; tie loosely so plant has room to grow. Monitor staked plants & loosen ties as the plant grows.
- Transplanting (repotting) and/or pruning may cause some plants to go into shock for a couple of weeks; most will survive while some may expire. Massage the roots from the soil of the old pots. Roots may need to be trimmed to fit the new pot but do not bend or wind the roots. Roots need air space so do not compact soil too much. Fill the pot with soil but leave ½ inch from the top to allow for watering.
- Clippings: Monitor & change clipping water (lukewarm/tepid) at least biweekly. Once clippings have established roots of about 1" long, place them in soil
- Feed/fertilize in spring & summer, every 2-4 weeks; reference care sheets as some plants require less/more and/or no feeding during the winter.
- Use only indoor plant food and fertilizer (some have offensive odor & may be too potent for indoor plants)
- Pests: Reference Pest Management document
- Indoor plant problems, causes, and treatments, reference Table 1

<https://www.houseplant411.com/>

<https://www.guide-to-houseplants.com/>

<http://www.just4growers.com/>

<https://www.rd.com/home/gardening/healthy-houseplant-tips/>

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**Table 1: Indoor plant problems, causes, and treatments**

Symptoms (what you see)	Possible causes	Treatment (corrective action)
Spindly, stems grow abnormally long. Leaves lack color, are undersized and may fall off.	Too little light	Move plant closer to window or other light source. Don't fertilize when plants are dormant (winter)
Old leaves curl under. New leaves are smaller than old leaves. Leaves may brown.	Too much light	Move plant farther from window or light source, or filter light through a curtain.
Yellow, brown or white (bleached) spots on leaves (particularly on upper leaves).	Sun scorch caused by sudden increase	Shade plant. Move plants from shade to sun gradually so they can adapt. Some require shade.
Leaves turn yellow, curl downward or wilt.	Too much heat	Move plant to a cooler spot. Avoid placing plants near heat registers or hot-air outlets.
Wilt even if soil is moist. Margins and tips of leaves burn. White crust may appear on leaf edges and on the soil surface when dry.	Salt buildup in soil	Water three times at 30-minute intervals to wash the salts out the drainage hole. Do not use soft water.
White crust on rim and sides of porous pots. Leaves touching rim wilt and die.	Salt accumulation on pot	Leach soil as described above. Wash excess salts off pot with clear water. Wax the rim of the pot to prevent future salt deposits that might touch leaves.
White or yellow spots on leaves of African violets, gloxinias & other hairy leaved plants.	Cold water on leaves or in soil	Use room-temperature to lukewarm water for watering,
Dark brown spots around leaf margins of tropical foliage plants (especially philodendrons).	Raw natural gas or incompletely burned gas in room	Check gas lines and fittings for gas leaks. Adjust gas burners for blue flame. Have furnace checked for leaks or adjustments.
Plants wilt between watering, roots fill pot and may grow out drainage hole. Growth slow.	Plant is too big for its pot	Repot in a larger container with a good potting soil mixture.
Sudden wilting or shedding of foliage during cold weather.	Chilling	Move plant away from chilling drafts.
Wilting and loss of foliage after repotting or initial potting.	Transplant shock	Give optimum care until plant adjusts to its new situation.
Tips of leaves turn brown and leaves wilt. Lower leaves turn yellow and fall off.	Not enough water	Water until some water runs out the drainage hole, or submerge the pot in a pail of water for 5 minutes. Drain off excess water. Repeat when soil is dry to touch.
Lower leaves curl and wilt. Stems become mushy and rot. Soil in pot is usually wet.	Too much water	Water less frequently. Use pots with drainage holes in the bottom. Do not allow pot to stand in water more than 30 minutes.
Leaf edges are crinkly and brown. Tips of new leaves often dry up.	Lack of humidity	Increase humidity by standing pots on a bed of moist gravel or placing them in planters with moist sphagnum moss packed around the pots. Use a humidifier or move plants to a more humid area.
Plants grow rapidly with lots of foliage but few, if any, flowers.	Too much fertilizer	Fertilize less often or at half the suggested rate. Use low-Nitrogen fertilizer during blooming season. Do not fertilize when plants are dormant (winter).
Lower leaves lose color and may drop off. New leaves are progressively smaller than previous leaves. Stems are stunted.	Too little fertilizer	Fertilize regularly when plants are growing. Use a soluble fertilizer and apply per package directions.
Brown/black spots on leaves. Tip and marginal burning. Spider plants, corn plants (Dracaena) and alams are especially sensitive.	Fluoride in water supply	Use rain or distilled water. Keep pH up to 6.5.

[Information taken from Cooperative Extension Service Fairbanks Master Gardener Class, 2018 Curriculum](#)