

Indoor Plants

By Patty Neas, Master Gardener

Do you love gardening? Gardening doesn't have to stop with winter weather. There are many ways you can continue to garden. Indoor plants lend a special beauty to your home or place of work. Let's bring the outdoors in and brighten your winter season with indoor plants!

Begin before the first frost, deciding if you want to overwinter some of your annuals. To overwinter, dig up the annuals, trim, and pot them using sterile soil to take inside. In addition to taking the whole plant inside you can also take cuttings to root. This can be very satisfying endeavor and learning experience. The result: free plants to put out in the spring!

You will also need to bring indoors the non-hardy houseplants you took outside for the summer. Be sure to check carefully for insects that could have gotten on these plants or in the soil over the summer. Clean the plant and pot. You can spray with insecticidal soap or horticultural oil to get rid of any insects. Plants need time to adapt to their new location. Gradually reduce light levels of the plants when you move them indoors. If your houseplants' leaves turn yellow and drop off, give them time to acclimate to the new growing conditions.

You may want to purchase some additional plants for your home. Be aware that some houseplants are toxic to pets. Whether you have had houseplants for years or are a beginner, let's look at some factors that affect the health of your indoor plants.

A south or east facing window is best. How do you know if these windows will provide enough light for your plants? "There's an app for that"! There are free light meter apps that will display light levels in your home and give you a list of plants that will grow successfully there. If your light levels are too low for some plants you want to grow, you can add intensity with fluorescent or LED lights. Here is a link to a video by the University of Tennessee "Indoor Plants and Light Needs" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7L_FMJIHm0

Light intensity is the level of light a plant receives. Low light plants are easy to grow and recommended for beginners. Iron plant, heart leaf philodendron and snake plant are examples. In addition, flowering plants like moth orchids (*Phalaenopsis*) sold in grocery and big box stores, amaryllis, African violets, and holiday cactus are easy. Keeping the leaves clean with a damp cloth helps with light for photosynthesis.

A second group of indoor plants need more light for growth. These include bromeliads, aloe vera, hen and chicks and Norfolk Island pine. Flowering plants included in this medium light group are anthurium, poinsettia, and kalanchoe.

Some plants need even higher levels of light and are more challenging to grow. These include begonias, fiddle leaf fig and maidenhair ferns.

A plant actively growing outdoors needs more water than one growing inside in lower light, cooler temperatures, and dryer air. Root rot from overwatering is the most common problem with indoor plants. Put your finger into the soil down to the middle joint. If the soil is dry, it needs

water. Water should be room temperature and if you are watering with fluorinated water, let it stand a few hours to dissipate before using.

Heat dries out the house during the winter. Sometimes the plant foliage browns or yellows from lack of humidity. In that case, you can mist your indoor plants, place them in a saucer with rocks and water, or move them to kitchens and bathrooms. Do remember to give space for air to circulate around the plants. Most houseplants grow best in day temperatures around 70°F and night temperatures around 60°F.

A plant doesn't need fertilizer during the winter months when it is not actively growing. You can begin fertilizing in March through October once a month. Repotting if necessary is usually best in spring because it allows the roots to grow quicker into the new potting soil.

Your commitment of time and effort with indoor plants rewards you with winter joy, beauty, and hope for spring. Holiday plants such as poinsettias, holiday cactus and forced spring bulbs and limbs will cheer you as you look forward to spring. A gardener's house isn't a home unless it has plants! Are you feeling that desire to have indoor plants this winter? Go for it! Whatever you decide to do, you will love the company of indoor plants. Happy Gardening!

Resources

Insects and Related Pests of House Plants

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/PB1157.pdf>

Managing Insects on Indoor Plants

<https://extension.umn.edu/product-and-houseplant-pests/insects-indoor-plants>

Selecting Indoor Plants for the Home or Office

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W1128A.pdf>

Starting Plants from Cuttings for the Home Gardener

<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=B1553&title=starting-plants-from-cuttings-for-the-home-gardener>

How to Care for and Get Your Holiday Cactus to Rebloom

https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/how_to_care_for_and_reflower_your_christmas_cactus#:~:text=Holiday%20cacti%20can%20be%20placed,temperatures%20dip%20below%2060%20F

Growing Orchids in the Home

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/PB1634.pdf>

Forcing Bulbs for Indoor Bloom

<https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g6550>

NEWS: The next University of Tennessee Master Gardener class at the Sullivan County Extension Office located at 140 Spurgeon Ln, Blountville, TN. starts on **January 30, 2024** and continues every Tuesday for 14 weeks.

10AM – 12noon

Call the Extension Office for information and application form.

423-574-1919

AND, here's a **terrific new resource from** UT for new residents

Welcome Home – Gardening in Tennessee

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/PB1919.pdf>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.