

Caring for Indoor Plants (published 1/18/2025)
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News Flash: Tennessee Tree Day 2025, a project of Tennessee Environmental Council (TEC), is the largest community tree-planting project of its kind in America. Tennessee residents will collectively plant more than 100,000 native tree seedlings in all 95 Tennessee counties during the weekend of March 15th. **Reserve your native trees now through March 2, 2025.** You will pick up your trees on March 14 or 15 and plant them on Tree Day, March 15. The trees are yours to plant on your own property and will enhance our environment and communities for generations to come! Tree seedlings are available for a suggested donation ranging from \$3.99 to \$4.99. If you cannot afford to make a donation at this time, visit the Tree Day homepage where you may request a scholarship for a limited number of complimentary trees.

Reserve your trees at <https://www.tectn.org/tennesseetreeday.html>

Now to our feature article

Indoor plants provide us with the greenery we love during the winter. If you want plants to brighten up a room, consider the amount of light, humidity and temperature they'll be expected to live in. Some plants may also require more TLC than others. For details about selecting the right plant, UT HORT has a great article for you, "Selecting Indoor Plants for the Home or Office," <https://uthort.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/228/2023/11/W1128A.pdf>.

If you received plants as gifts or are moving plants from outdoors inside, check carefully for insects. Consider "quarantining" them for a short time to be sure they are free of pests. For details on how to deal with problems on indoor plants, see "Pest and Disease Problems of Indoor Plants" at: <https://extension.psu.edu/pest-and-disease-problems-of-indoor-plants>.

To keep your indoor plants happy, your to-do list needs to include cleaning, pruning, watering, fertilizing, and repotting tasks.

Cleaning and Pruning

Just like everything in the house, plants need to be cleaned every now and then. Their pores can become clogged with dust and hinder them from breathing in oxygen and moisture. Dust can also impede photosynthesis. For plants with smooth leaves, dampen a soft cloth with water and gently wipe the leaves. If the plant has fine hairs, use a dry, soft brush to gently dust the leaves.

Another cleaning chore is pruning out dead or damaged leaves or spent flowers. It's a good idea to do this weekly.

Watering

Indoor plants need a little more thought regarding watering. Overwatering can cause damage while underwatering can limit plant growth. The type of water used also makes a big difference in plant health. City water may contain fluorine and chlorine that can harm plants. The chemicals used in water softeners can also cause problems. Consider buying deionized for your indoor plants if you have city water or use a water softener.

Pour water from the top until water drains from the holes in bottom of the pot. Discard the drained water to avoid keeping roots too wet. If you water from the bottom, you'll still need to water from the top occasionally to prevent salt accumulation in the potting mix.

Generally, plants need less water in the winter because they grow more slowly than in warm weather. Also, know which plants need a lot of water and don't like the soil to dry out. On the other hand, some plants prefer soil to dry before they need water. Make sure you know your plants' needs.

Fertilizing

As with watering, plants generally need less fertilizer in the winter than during the warm growing season. Also, when you pot your plant, the fresh potting soil will have enough nutrients to support the plants for several weeks. To avoid overfertilizing, plan on monthly fertilizing with 1/4th to 1/3rd the normal amount of fertilizer. You may even skip fertilizing during the mid-winter months. If leaves start to turn pale, it may indicate the need to fertilize. Conversely, if the tips of leaves appear burned, it may indicate too much fertilizer.

Repotting

If your plant has grown to the point you need to think about repotting, congratulations! You've been taking great care of your plant. Now it's decision time. Do you want to keep the plant the same size or do you want it to keep growing?

You can manage your plant size and keep it contained by removing the pot, trimming the roots, then repotting with fresh potting mix. It will be perfectly happy with that.

But, if you want to keep it growing, you'll need to repot into a larger container. As luck would have it, there is a UT YouTube video to help you:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LR_SNbJt5M.

Here is a summary of the tips in the video.

- Select a pot that is 1 inch larger in diameter than the previous pot.

- Make sure the pot is clean.

- Add potting mix to the bottom of the new pot.

- If roots are tightly wound or encircling the root ball, lightly trim them.

- Place the plant in the pot and fill in with new potting mix.

- Leave about ½ to 1 inch at the top to allow for watering without overflowing.

Keep your indoor plants happy and enjoy the indoor gardening until it's time to get back outdoors!

Resources

Selecting Indoor Plants for the Home or Office, <https://uthort.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/228/2023/11/W1128A.pdf>

Growing Indoor Plants with Success,

https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/pdf/B%201318_6.PDF

Indoor Plants – Soil Mixes, <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/indoor-plants-soil-mixes/>

Caring for Indoor Plants, <https://uthort.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/228/2023/11/W1128B.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.