

Water — a basic need for house plants

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Low humidity is a common problem in homes, especially during the winter months and is one of the chief factors responsible for failure in growing house plants. Humidifiers or air conditioners improve the moisture content of the air. Pans of water placed on radiators or hot air registers can also help. Misting with water is beneficial to many plants but should be avoided on those with hairy or fuzzy leaves such as African Violet or Begonia. The hairs of these leaves trap the water droplets thus encouraging the development of disease.

As well as water in the air, plants require water in their growing media. Lack of water can cause a check in growth, leaf shedding and unsightly plants with dull unattractive foliage. Too much water results in a lack of oxygen in the soil and promotes the death and decay of roots and plant parts at the soil level.

When and how often should you water? Once a day? Or once a week? Plants should be watered according to their individual requirements based on environmental conditions, type and size of plant, kind of growing media and the container size and type. During hot, sunny days plants will require more frequent watering than on cool, cloudy days. When watering always add sufficient water to wet the soil right to the bottom of the pot.

The appearance of the soil surface usually indicates when water is required — but don't be fooled! Some growing mixes will dry out quickly at the surface while remaining wet deeper down. Use your finger to check the soil farther down in the pot

and check the drainage hole(s) to see if the soil is wet at the bottom of the pot. If the pot is made of clay, tapping the sides will indicate dryness. A dry pot will give a clear ringing sound when tapped. If the mix is wet the pot will give a dull sound.

