



THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO HOUSEPLANTS



CONTENTS

- 5 **PICKING THE BEST LOCATION**
- 15 **IDEAL TEMPERATURE AND HUMIDITY**
- 17 **HOW TO WATER HOUSEPLANTS**
- 19 **THE PERFECT HOUSEPLANT COMPOST**
- 23 **WHY PLANTS NEED FEEDING**
- 29 **COMMON PEST & DISEASE PROBLEMS**
- 37 **ESSENTIAL HOUSEPLANT CARE**



**KEEP
GROWING**



WELCOME



Dan Walford
Gardening Expert

Dan is a trained horticulturist with more than 20 years' experience growing plants – both outside and indoors. He has grown 1000's of pot plants commercially and worked as a Tropical Horticulturist at The Eden Project. His passion for houseplants started when he travelled the tropics and saw many of the plants we love to have in our homes, growing in their natural habitat.

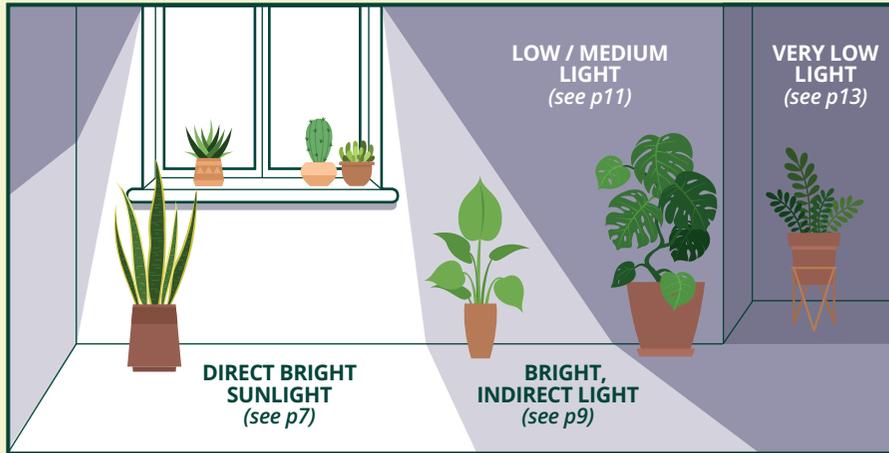
"Houseplants bring life to our homes. Not only do they add beauty and greenery, but they also provide a wide range of health and well-being benefits. Taking care of them can feel overwhelming when you start out, but if you provide the right environment and basic care, anyone can become a good houseplant parent."

"In this guide I'll share some of my top tips to care for a wide range of common, and easy to grow, houseplants. We'll begin by finding the best spot to make your plant feel right at home, and then I'll advise on some basic care to ensure they continue to thrive."

PICKING THE RIGHT LOCATION

Right plant, right place

When it comes to growing plants indoors, light is the most important factor when deciding what plants to grow and where they should be placed. The majority of houseplants prefer bright, indirect light, but some can tolerate low light, or direct light conditions.



On pages 7-14 of this guide we'll advise the best light locations for some of the most commonly grown houseplants. Pick the right spot for your plant and you'll be giving them the best possible chance to succeed.



DIRECT BRIGHT SUNLIGHT

A south or west-facing windowsill will be in sun most of the day – for many houseplants this will scorch their leaves and cause wilting (especially during the summer months). Here are some sun lovers that'll thrive in direct sunlight.

Cacti and Succulents



ZZ plant
Zamioculcas zamiifolia



Flaming Katy
Crassula ovata



Venus fly trap
Dionaea muscipula



Hen & chicks
Echeveria



Aloe
Aloe vera



Snake plant
Sansevieria trifasciata



Bird of paradise
Strelitzia reginae



Money plant
Crassula ovata



BRIGHT, INDIRECT LIGHT

The vast majority of houseplants will grow their best in bright, indirect light that's out of full sun. This mimics their natural habitat, growing on the rainforest floor, where dappled light reaches them through the canopy above.



Radiator plant
Peperomia metalia

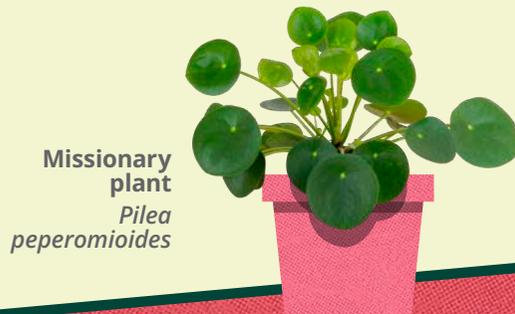
Rubber plant
Ficus elastica



Yucca
Yucca elephantipes



Fiddle-leaf fig
Ficus lyrata



Missionary plant
Pilea peperomioides

Orchids
Phalaenopsis



Amaryllis
Hippeastrum



Elephants ear
Alocasia x amazonica



Christmas cactus /
Easter cactus
Schlumbergera buckleyi / gaetneri



Maidenhair fern
Adiantum radicans



LOW / MEDIUM LIGHT

If your plants are placed deeper in the room, or the window is obscured by netting or other plants, then the amount of light will be significantly reduced. In this situation even a south-facing window will avoid strong direct sunlight.



Umbrella tree
Schefflera arboricola

Parlour palm
Chamaedorea elegans



Kentia palms
Howea fosteriana



Chinese evergreen
Aglaonema

Dumb cane / Leopard lily
Dieffenbachia



Boston fern
Nephrolepis exaltata



Peacock plant / Prayer plant
Calathea / Maranta



Heart-leaf philodendron
Philodendron scandens



Spider plant
Chlorophytum comosum



Swiss cheese plant
Monstera deliciosa



Weeping Fig
Ficus benjamina



Pothos
Epipremnum

VERY LOW LIGHT

A room with a north-facing window, or a plant positioned far from natural sunlight, would be classed as receiving low light (especially during the winter months). Some plants will tolerate these conditions, but growth will be slower so water and feed accordingly.



Heart-leaf philodendron
Philodendron scandens



Cast iron plant
Aspidistra eliator



Snake plant
Sansevieria trifasciata



ZZ plant
Zamioculcas zamiifolia

English ivy (non-variegated)
Hedera helix



Peace lily
Spathiphyllum wallisii



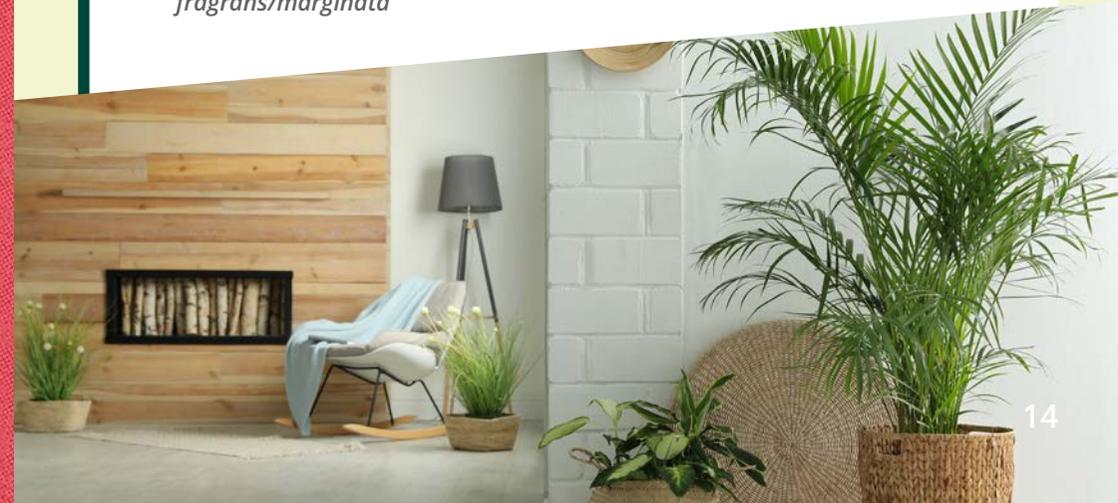
Parlour palm
Chamaedorea elegans



Dragon tree
Dracaena fragrans/marginata



Bird's nest fern
Asplenium nidus



IDEAL TEMPERATURE & HUMIDITY

After considering light levels when picking the best spot for your houseplants, the next most important factors are temperature and humidity. Spaces where the light is good, the temperature is roughly between 18°C – 24°C and there's good air circulation, will prove the best location for your houseplants.

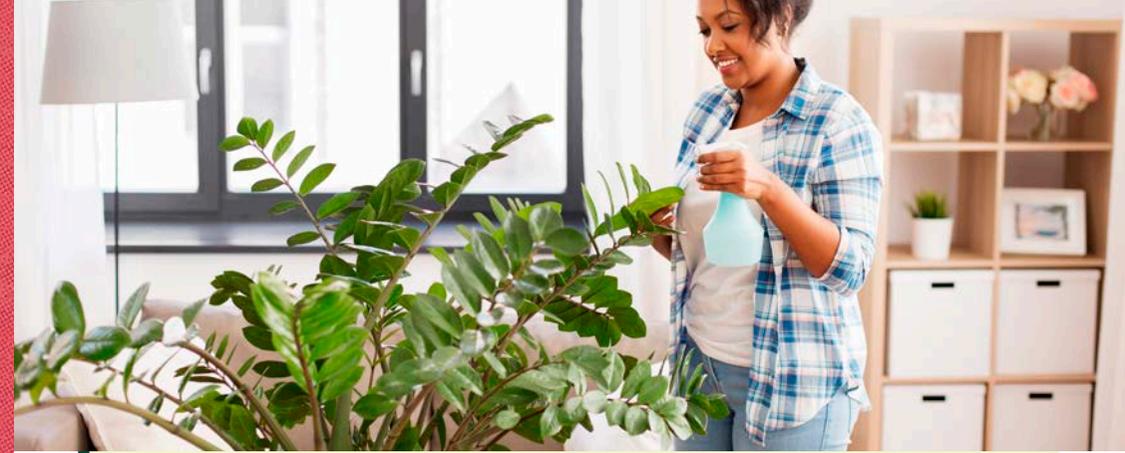


Temperature

Originating in mostly tropical and sub-tropical climates, houseplants will not grow well if inside temperatures are extremely low or extremely high. Most plants will prefer room temperatures that are warm during the day and slightly cooler at night. As a general rule, if you feel comfortable in your home, then your plants will too.

Houseplants don't like large swings in temperature so try to avoid the following locations:

- Near or above radiators - unfortunately these are often located under windows
- Under air-conditioning or fans - these tend to blow out dry air, which isn't good for plants
- In draughts - such as near an external door where they'll be directly in the airflow



Humidity

Most houseplants, especially those grown for their foliage, need more humidity than that found in our modern, centrally-heated homes. If your houseplants begin to show browning at the leaf tips and edges, then this is a sign that the air around them is too dry.

To help your houseplants thrive, there are different ways you can maintain humidity:

- Group houseplants together - this will trap moist air around the leaves
- Mist frequently - best done in the morning so the leaves are dry over night
- Placing your pots on watered gravel trays - evaporating moisture will keep the air humid



"Don't be tempted to move your houseplants into the bathroom in the belief that humidity from the shower will suffice. The bathroom is often the coldest and worst lit room in the house."



HOW TO WATER HOUSEPLANTS

Although watering can seem like an easy job to carry out, incorrect watering is the biggest cause of houseplant failures. Find out how to provide the correct amount of water and apply it in the right way.

The method

The majority of plants are fine to be watered from above or below.

For **top watering**, simply wet the surface of the compost until excess water drains freely from the holes in the bottom of the pot.

For **bottom watering**, stand the pot on a plant saucer or in a bowl or sink. Water from below until the compost is fully saturated, then allow it to drain before returning to its usual position. This usually takes around 20 minutes.

Hairy-leaved plants can retain water on the leaf surface, which can cause rotting, so these are best watered from below.



“Houseplants hate waterlogged compost, so make sure your pot has adequate drainage holes and never leave them sitting in water.”

The water

Use room temperature or “tepid” water to avoid a cold shock to the roots (no one likes a cold shower!). Most plants are fine with tap water, but some are sensitive to the chemicals in our drinking water so filtered water, or rain water, is preferred.

How often?

As a general rule you should only water when the top 5cm of the compost feels dry. A great way to know when it's time to water is the ‘finger test’. Simply push your finger into the compost until you reach your second knuckle. If the compost feels dry, then your plant needs watering. If the compost is still moist, don't water but be sure to check again in a few days.

“A thirsty plant and a drowned plant will both show signs of wilting - so it's important to check the compost before taking action”.



THE PERFECT HOUSEPLANT COMPOST

When you start with a great compost to grow in, you'll bring out the best in your houseplants.

The perfect compost can sustain healthy plant growth by allowing water and nutrients to reach the roots while still providing adequate airflow. Yes, roots need air to breathe! This is why waterlogged plants struggle to grow – the water drives out the air. Miracle-Gro® Peat Free Plant & Grow is a lightweight mix that has great moisture absorption and retention characteristics.

For orchids, such as moth orchids (phalaenopsis), choose a specialist orchid compost (see p21) since they prefer a coarse bark mix. This is also ideal for bromeliads and other plants with aerial roots.

Eventually, your houseplants will become pot-bound and may show signs of stunted growth or other problems, which means you'll need to move them to a new pot.

Only repot when the plant needs it, when the roots have more-or-less filled the pot and there is little compost remaining.

“Houseplants should only be repotted into a slightly larger pot - too much excess compost can become water logged and cause root rots.”



How to repot your houseplants

1. If possible slide your fingers around the main stem, turn the pot upside down and gently remove the plant, squeezing the pot to release it. For bigger plants, carefully hold the main stem(s) and gently slide it out of its pot
2. Carefully loosen the plant roots with your fingers, removing some of the old compost from around the base. This will also help it settle into its new home
3. Add a layer of compost into the new pot and gently firm it down. If your new pot doesn't have a drainage hole, use a slightly smaller plastic pot with drainage holes and pop it inside
4. Place your plant in the new pot, making sure it's centred, and then add compost around the sides, gently firming with your fingers as you fill, until it is secure
5. Give your plant a thorough watering to settle the compost and welcome it into its new home



Topdressing

Even if your houseplants don't need repotting, it's a great idea to give the compost an annual refresh. This will give your plants a new lease of life. Simply scrape away the top few centimeters of the old compost and then replace this with fresh.



HOUSEPLANT COMPOSTS

Miracle-Gro® Peat Free Plant & Grow

No more backache from lifting heavy bags of compost with Miracle-Gro® Peat Free Plant & Grow lightweight compost. Light in weight, but not in quality, this mighty compost will feed your plants for up to six months and help retain up to 25% more moisture.



Miracle-Gro® Peat Free Premium Orchid Special Plants Compost

Catering for the special needs of orchids. Its unique formulation contains all the necessary nutrients and large pieces of high-quality pine bark to provide the perfect environment for your orchids to thrive.



Miracle-Gro® Peat Free Premium Houseplant Potting Mix

A unique three-part patented formulation. It caters for the needs of houseplants and will feed them for three months. This unique compost provides the optimum structure for strong root growth and controls water availability according to their needs.



Miracle-Gro® Peat Free Premium Cactus & Bonsai Compost

Specially formulated for the needs of cacti, succulents, bonsai, alpiners and African violets. It is perfect for use in pots, containers and hanging baskets.



Miracle-Gro® Peat Free Premium Mediterranean & Citrus Compost

Specially formulated for Mediterranean types of plants, such as bougainvillea, palm trees, orange, lemon and lime trees. It is perfect for use in pots, containers and hanging baskets.



WHY PLANTS NEED FEEDING

Just like us, our houseplants need more than just water to survive. To grow, flower and stay healthy they need feeding.

Composts contain nutrients, but these won't last forever, they need replenishing to provide the ongoing nutrients a plant needs. This is important during the spring and summer months when our houseplants are actively growing and at their hungriest. Most houseplants don't require feeding during the autumn and winter months when they're having a rest.

"A well fed, happy plant will grow bigger, flower longer, have a root system and can cope better against pests and diseases."



Liquid feeding

A liquid plant food is a great way to feed, as nutrients are immediately available and readily absorbed.

1. Ensure the compost is moist as this will help plant roots absorb nutrients
2. Add the liquid houseplant food to your watering can and apply in accordance with the product label
3. To avoid the mixing, measuring and mess, ready to use products can be applied straight from the bottle *(see p26 & 27)*
4. Drip feed products can be inserted directly into the compost to feed for up to a month *(see p27)*

Foliar feeding

Plant roots are responsible for taking up the majority of the nutrients plants need, but did you know that the leaves can also absorb plant food? Misting the foliage with a nutrient-rich spray enables efficient uptake straight into the leaf.

Miracle-Gro® Spray & Spritz is a ready-to-use foliar mist and fertiliser *(see p29)*.

Granular feeding

For an even lower maintenance approach, and for the forgetful gardener, slow-release granules provide a small amount of plant food every time you water your plants. They can be scattered over the soil surface or incorporated into the compost when you repot - again, be sure to follow the product label instructions *(see p28)*.

HOUSEPLANT FOOD

Miracle-Gro® All Purpose Concentrated Liquid Plant Food

A formulation containing Humifirst, which is rich in organic matter – stimulating growth, yield, root formation and improving plant resistance to environmental stresses. Guaranteed visibly healthier plants in seven days.



Miracle-Gro® Performance Organics All Purpose Concentrated Liquid Plant Food

A high performance, 100% natural and organic liquid plant food that is glorious on plants but gentle on nature. Made purely from plants, this mighty feed will give you visibly healthier plants in seven days.



Miracle-Gro® Azalea, Camellia & Rhododendron Concentrated Liquid Plant Food

A formulation containing Humifirst, which is rich in organic matter – stimulating growth, yield, root formation and improving plant resistance to environmental stresses. It is perfect for indoor azaleas and other acid-loving plants. Feeds for up to two weeks.



Miracle-Gro® Pour & Feed™ Ready To Use Plant Food

Ideal for all plants. Now with an added bio-stimulant, which works as a natural super food for your plants, ensuring they grow healthy and beautiful. Easy to apply – no dilution, no hassle!



Miracle-Gro® Pump & Feed All Purpose

No mixing, no measuring, no mess. Just one simple pump of Miracle-Gro® Pump & Feed All Purpose will feed your plants for one week with glorious results.



Miracle-Gro® Organic Pump & Feed All Purpose

No mixing, no measuring, no mess. Just one simple pump of Miracle-Gro® Organic Pump & Feed All Purpose will feed your plants for one week with glorious results. 100% natural and organic liquid plant food.



HOUSEPLANT FOOD

Miracle-Gro® Pump & Feed Orchid

No mixing, no measuring, no mess. Just one simple pump of Miracle-Gro® Pump & Feed Orchid will feed your orchid plants for one week with glorious results.



Miracle-Gro® Drip & Feed All Purpose

No mixing, no measuring, no mess. Just one Miracle-Gro® Drip & Feed All Purpose inserted into the compost will feed each plant for up to one month!



Miracle-Gro® Drip & Feed Orchid

No mixing, no measuring, no mess. Just one Miracle-Gro® Drip & Feed Orchid will feed each orchid plant for up to one month!



Miracle-Gro® Push & Feed All Purpose

No mixing, no measuring, no mess. Just one Miracle-Gro® Push & Feed All Purpose fertiliser cone will give you glorious results that last for up to six months!



Miracle-Gro® Spray & Spritz

No mixing, no measuring, no mess. Just a few weekly mists of Miracle-Gro® Spray & Spritz Hydration Mist For Orchids around the roots and leaves of your orchids will lock in moisture for longer lasting flowers and healthier, happier plants.



COMMON PEST & DISEASE PROBLEMS

Houseplants that are well cared for, given the correct position, watered and fed regularly as needed, tend to be stronger and healthier than those that aren't looked after properly. This means they're less likely to succumb to pest attacks and other problems in the first place.

"Check for any problems before you buy any new plants and bring them into the home, you don't want to import pest problems!"



Pest control

Check your plants regularly and be on the lookout for any dreaded pest attacks. Pay particular attention to the undersides of leaves, growing points, flowers and flower buds, which is where pests tend to gather.

Dealing with one or two pests, and squashing them with your fingers or in some kitchen paper, is much easier and quicker than trying to control a major outbreak.

If using an insecticide, spray them outside and wait until the leaves have dried before bringing the plant back inside.



Insect pests

The following pests can be quite common and attack a wide range of plants. Most suck the sap from the plant, leading to weaker plants and often show up as irregular growth or discoloured leaves.



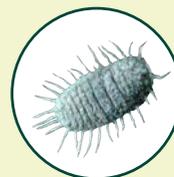
Fungus Gnats



Aphids



Whitefly



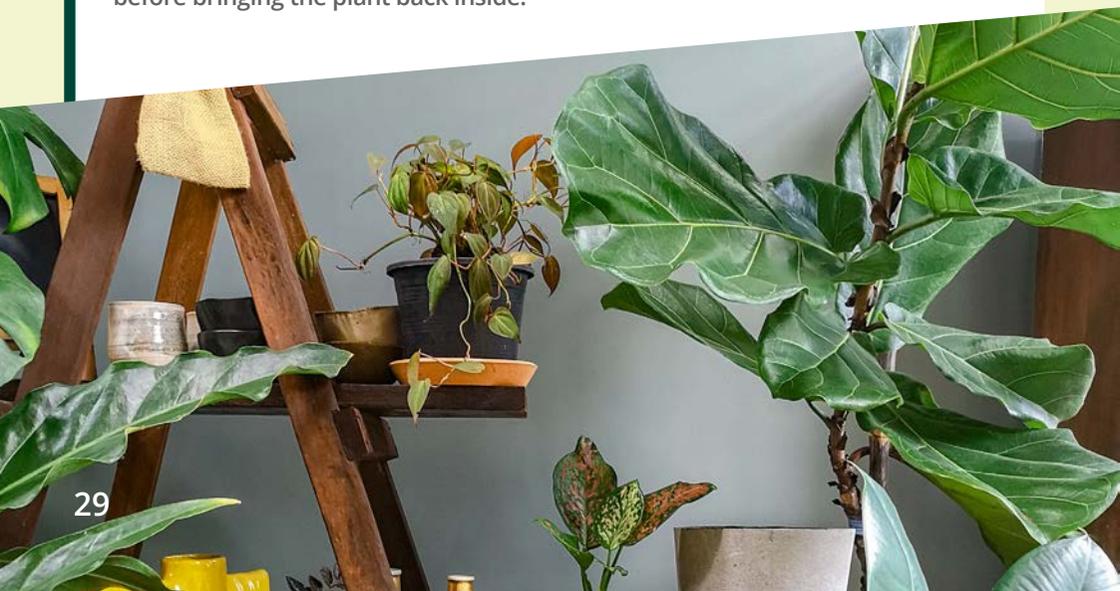
Mealybug



Scale Insects



Red Spider Mite



COMMON PEST & DISEASE PROBLEMS

Fungus Gnats

Fungus gnats, also known as compost gnats, are annoying small flies that fly around your houseplants. They are worse when composts are kept too wet, so try to let the compost dry out between waterings.



You can add a barrier layer, such as sharp sand or fine grit, to the compost surface to prevent the adult gnats laying their eggs. The larvae, who feed on the compost and roots, rarely damage established plants.

Aphids

Occasionally, aphids may appear on houseplants, usually when a plant that's been outside or a new addition to your collection has brought them in on its leaves.

The best solution is to either squash the aphids or take the infected plant outside and spray the leaves with an organic insecticide.



Whitefly

These small, all-white flies, can attack plants in large numbers when they get established. If disturbed, they fly off in a 'cloud' of white.

Take the affected plants outside and give the leaves a blast with a jet of water to dislodge this pest. An insecticide spray will also help deal with them or try putting some basil leaves on top of the compost to deter this pest naturally.



Mealybug

Mealybugs look like little clumps of cotton wool. They get their name from the "mealy", white waxy material that covers them.



The mealy covering makes control with an insecticide difficult. Start by gently removing them with a damp sponge or kitchen paper. Then spray with an insecticide.

Scale insects

Scale insects look like small, brown limpets, usually attached to the undersides of leaves or on the main stems. They usually attack plants with woody stems; citrus, for example, are among their favourite foods.



Their hard outer scale makes control with an insecticide difficult. Start by gently scraping them off with a damp sponge or kitchen paper. Then spray with an insecticide.

Red spider mite

Despite their name, these tiny mites aren't red – more often they're orange or brown. Because they're so small, they're frequently overlooked and the first signs you see are when the leaves discolour, and the plant is covered in the mite's fine cobwebbing.

Spider mites prefer hot, dry conditions and don't like high humidity, so mist plants daily. And you can also spray the plant with an insecticide.



COMMON PEST & DISEASE PROBLEMS

Fungal diseases

Houseplants are rarely troubled by diseases like moulds, mildews and spots, but sometimes these fungal problems can occur.

Poor air circulation around plants, high temperatures and excess humidity provide ideal conditions for these diseases to spread. Generally, if you spread your plants out a little so that they're not too close together, improve ventilation, reduce the room temperature (even by just a couple of degrees) and ensure you're not overwatering, these problems disappear.

Wiping leaves with a soft, dampened cloth to wipe off traces of moulds and mildews is usually all that's needed to remove traces of infection after you've taken care of the above. But you could spray them with a fungicide.



Environmental disorders

Plants react quickly if the conditions in which they are growing aren't to their liking. They show their dislike of these "physiological disorders" by wilting, producing brown edges to the leaves or other discolouration, and dropping leaves and flowers. Things to look out for include:

- Lack of water may result in browning of leaf edges, wilting, loss of green colouration and dry appearance of the plant and compost. Most will respond quickly when watered, picking up within a day or so
- Overwatering could cause rotting of both roots and stems. The compost may also develop a bad odour. The best option is to repot into fresh mix – a compost that's been too wet for an extended period will break down rapidly, resulting in poor growth



PLANT PROTECTION



BugClear™ Ultra 2

Controls aphids, mealybug, red spider mite and other common houseplant pests that attack the leaves and stems. Based on rapeseed oil, it is fully certified for use in organic gardening.



FungusClear® Ultra 2

Helps fight existing infections such as powdery mildew, black spot and rust, as well as protecting from new fungal disease attacks. Certified for use in organic gardening, it can be used for up to six treatments per year.





ESSENTIAL HOUSEPLANT CARE

If you get into the hang of checking your plants regularly, you'll learn how well they're doing and what, if anything, you need to do for them. As a result, they'll grow much better, and you'll be rewarded with gorgeous, happy, healthy houseplants that are a joy to have in your home.

For more information on all of the featured products, plus great gardening advice, visit: [lovethegarden.com](https://www.lovethegarden.com)

Use plant protection products safely. Always read the label and product information before use. Miracle-Gro® is a trademark of OMS Investments, Inc. and is used under licence from OMS Investments, Inc.



Check for watering

Do the 'finger' test (*see p18*) or lift up the pot and "weigh" it in your hands. If it's light it needs watering, if it's heavy then check again in a few days.



Check for signs of stress

This could be due to incorrect light or temperature conditions, pests or diseases, incorrect watering or lack of feed.



Mist

Those plants that prefer high humidity around the leaves should be misted with tepid water - ideally once a day.



Rotate

Plants growing close to a window may need rotating to ensure even growth on all sides.



Clean/dust leaves

Wiping the leaves with a damp cloth, or sponge removes any build-up of dust and can help remove pests.



Trim and prune

Remove dead or damaged leaves, pick off old, faded flowers (called deadheading) and cut back any unwanted or weak growth.



Check roots

If the roots are growing out of the drainage hole, it's a fairly good sign that your plants need repotting.



Talk to them!

Can talking to your plants really help them grow? Some say it's an urban myth, but others swear by it. Whatever you think, it's a good way for us to get a little horticultural therapy!

KEEP GROWING