

## ANSWERING FOLIAGE PLANT QUERRIES

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A living plant creates an environment of life and warmth in any setting. Research has shown that people react more favorably toward their fellow man while working in an environment of living plants.

During the past few years much emphasis has been placed upon the living plant for public buildings and the home. Many florists, plant shops, and garden centers have emphasized the use and specialized in the selling of foliage plants. The growth of this industry was so rapid that the supply was not equal to the demand. Many of the plants that went into the marketplace, and eventually to the consumer, were lost or killed by those who did not understand their care and culture.

The term "how to grow plants" should be rephrased to "how do plants grow" when referring to foliage plants. It is in these few words that the understanding of the plant can mean its life or death.

Improper conditioning, light, water, temperature, humidity, and lack of knowledge can discourage the homeowner from using a living landscape.

The living plant has been a boon to the florist industry and has carried flower shops and plant stores over the quiet seasons. The purpose of this article is to outline some of the problems and suggest remedies when selling and using foliage plants.

Foliage plants are usually purchased directly from a grower or jobber. When the plants arrive, they should be thoroughly checked for insects and diseases

and then conditioned to their new environment. This can mean a thorough watering to reduce salts, adjustment to new light requirements, repotting, and new temperatures. The conditioning period may take from one to three months depending on the plant species and the time of year. During conditioning, up to 1/3 of the leaves may yellow and fall as the plant adjusts to its new environment.

Once acclimated, they are ready to be sold to the retail consumer. This is where the knowledge of "how do plants grow" really pays off. The right choice of plant for the home situation goes a long way in creating a satisfied customer. Consider these factors--light, temperature, air conditioning, fertilization practices, and the individual's willingness to care for the plant.

Light--Some foliage plants are grown in open fields, others in shaded lath houses or greenhouses. Light is the most critical in fall and winter shipments. Many plants need more light than is usually available and may require supplemental light to maintain health. Consult the various charts on light requirements for specific plant species.

Soil--Plants will arrive in various growing media. The soil should be light and relatively low in fertility. A good light soil mixture could be one part sandy loam or composted soil, one part sphagnum peat moss, and one part sand or perlite. Heavy soils may prove to be disastrous because the soil holds too much water, reducing aeration, and the plant roots suffocate. The plants respond by turning yellow, dropping leaves, and having a generally unhealthy appearance. The black coloration in the center of Schefflera and the dropping of Ficus leaves is often due to poor root activity. Potting soils should be investigated before use. Some contain excessive fertilizer and can damage your crop.

Water--Upon arrival at the shop or greenhouse, some plants should be thoroughly leached to remove some of the salts that may have accumulated in the soil. Foliage plants should be watered only when necessary. Water should be applied to thoroughly soak the soil. Ten percent of the water applied runs out of the drain hole in the bottom. Foliage dish gardens may be soaked well and then tipped to pour off the excess water.

Some plants have special needs for water. Bromeliads need to be watered only in leaf cups. This plant has little or no roots, so watering the soil may cause crown rot resulting in loss of the plant.

Fertilizer--Foliage plants need little fertilizer. Many are grown with slow release fertilizer mixed into or on the surface of the soil. The pellets are the remaining shells of the slow-release fertilizer. A soil test will help determine nutrient requirements for the grower. House plant food, either water soluble or dry, would be helpful periodically during the life of the plant. Most foliage plants are maintained, not really grown, in the home.

Temperature--This will, in part, determine the rate of growth of your plants. From the standpoint of the plant, the night temperature should be about 60°F. However, most foliage plants tolerate temperatures of 68-72°F. Air conditioning does help to maintain more even temperatures during the summer.

Humidity--This will vary with the time of year. In the greenhouse, mist the foliage during hot days. Supply shade to reduce burning from the sun. In dry shops, humidifiers will be helpful along with moistening foliage periodically. Remember, some plants respond to high humidity while others do not.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR COMMON HOUSE PLANTS

Latin Name	Common Name	Light	Temperature	Humidity	Remarks
<i>Aglaonema simplex</i>	Chinese Wax Begonia	Subdued sunlight	Warm	Tolerant	Can be grown in water.
<i>Begonia semperflorens</i>	Wax Begonia	Indirect	Warm	Low to medium	Outdoors in summer.
<i>Bromeliads</i>	Many species	Low	Tolerant	Tolerant	Water in cup only.
<i>Chlorophytum sp.</i>	Spider Plant	Indirect	Tolerant	Tolerant	Flowers under long nights.
<i>Crassula arborescens</i>	Jade Plant	Indirect	Tolerant	Tolerant	Allow to dry between waterings.
<i>Dieffenbachia amoena</i>	Dumb Cane	Indirect	Warm	Medium	Allow to dry moderately between waterings.
<i>Dracaena godseffiana</i>	Spotted dracaena	Indirect	Warm	Low to medium	Slow growing. Good corner plant.
<i>Ficus elastica</i>	Rubber Plant	Indirect	Tolerant	Low to medium	Drops a leaf every time it is moved.
<i>Hedera helix</i>	English Ivy	Full sun	Tolerant	Tolerant	Pinch ends of shoots to produce laterals.
<i>Maranta sp.</i>	Prayer Plant	Indirect	Warm	Low	May cease active at certain times of year.

Latin Name	Common Name	Light	Temperature	Humidity	Remarks
Peperomia sandersi	Watermelon leaf begonia	Bright	Warm	Low to medium	In summer bury pots in ground in partial shade.
Philodendron cordatum	Heartleaf philodendron	Out of direct sunlight	Tolerant	Medium	Easy to grow.
Pilea cadieri	Aluminum Plant	Indirect	Warm	Low	Interesting foliage.
Plectranthis sp.	Swedish Ivy	Indirect	Warm	Low	Easy to propagate.
Saintpaulia icantha	African Violet	Indirect	Warm	Medium	Do not wet leaves.
Sansevieria zeylanica	Snake Plant	Any	Warm	Tolerant	Allow to dry moderately between waterings.
Schefflera actinophylla	Schefflera	Indirect	Tolerant	Medium	For large containers watch water and light requirements.
Scindapsus aureus	Pothos Devil's Ivy	Indirect	Tolerant	Low to medium	Grown like philodendron, less water.
Tolmiea menziesii	Pick-a-Back Plant	Indirect	Cool	Medium	Foliage burns easily in sunlight.

## Plant Signs You Should Know

1. Lower leaves turn yellow, drop off, loss of roots.  
Check overwatering, not enough water, pot too small.
2. Yellow leaves drop off plant.  
Gas fumes, rapid change in temperature, change in light intensity, poor drainage, lack of roots.
3. Small or yellow leaves.  
Poor soil, low light, low fertility.
4. Burn around edge of leaves and leaf tip.  
Too much fertilizer, too little water, drying out of soil.
5. Weak or spindly growth.  
Too little light, low fertility.
6. Spots on leaves or flowers.  
Fungus diseases, pesticide injury.
7. Black leaf spot.  
Poor air circulation.
8. Rot at soil level.  
Bacteria or fungi, damping-off (brown color), discard plants.

Foliage plants in their wide use today have brought retail florists to the forefront, especially those who want to understand "how do plants grow." They have found them to be profitable, yet frustrating at times due to insufficient knowledge about pests and proper conditioning.

You can sell plants along with other services such as rental of foliage plants, rejuvenation of plants, or periodic plant check-ups. It's all up to you if you are to understand "how do plants grow."