

Healthy Houseplants

Winter is tough on indoor plants – little or no growth, coupled with temperature fluctuations, and often too much water can spell the end!

Watering

Over watering is usually the cause of a houseplant suddenly turning up its toes. This may happen several months down the track, leaving you wondering just what went wrong. Correct diagnosis can only be determined by examining the roots. Soft and squishy or skeleton roots point to over watering. Low temperatures and inactive growth over winter mean indoor plants require far less watering than the warm temperatures and active growth of spring and summer. During winter, water indoor plants just enough to keep the potting mix as moist as a 'squeezed out sponge'. Frequency of watering depends on how large and how root bound the plant is, and the ambient temperature of the room. Some plants, such as cacti and succulents need to be kept almost dry over winter.

Light and Heat

Ideally, indoor plants should be moved to the warm side of the house to bright, but not direct sunlight. They need to be protected from cold draughts and wild fluctuations in temperature. Those in heated rooms should be placed on a saucer filled with pebbles and topped with water, to increase the ambient humidity.

Feeding

Liquid feed flowering plants, such as cyclamen, to maintain bud production. Cease feeding non-flowering plants until spring.

Grooming

Remove spent blooms and foliage and check for scale, mealy bug and mites, particularly on foliage plants. If detected, take the plant outdoors on a warm day and spray with an organic insecticide. Allow to dry in the shade and bring back indoors before nightfall. Clean leaves by misting with tepid water and wiping with a soft lint free cloth.



Repotting

Winter is a good time to repot plants while they are dormant. Repot any plants that look unhealthy or have roots growing through the base of the pot. Either pot up a size or trim the plants roots and repot into the same pot. Always clean pots with disinfectant and use fresh potting mix. Never pot a plant into a much larger pot, as the roots will not be able to absorb enough moisture. Eventually, the potting mix will become sodden and the roots will rot.