



Indoor Gardening

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Indoor gardeners enjoy houseplants for aesthetic and health benefits. Besides being an attractive addition to our homes, plants improve the air by absorbing carbon dioxide and volatile toxins while giving off oxygen and humidifying the air. All plants need light, a suitable pot with soil mix, and water. When choosing a plant for a particular place in your home, first consider the natural light. Indoor light can be bright direct (a south facing window), bright indirect (near a sunny window, but not in direct sunlight), medium (without direct sun), and low (north-facing windows or windows shaded by walls or trees). Whatever light level you have, your plants will grow more evenly if you turn them every week to balance the light on all sides of the plants.

The second consideration is the pot and soil. The pot should be big enough to support the plant and have room for root growth. Pots should always have a drainage hole at the bottom. Cacti and succulents thrive in unglazed clay pots, while leafy green plants do well and need less watering in glazed or plastic pots. Use a good potting mix instead of garden soil. For cacti and succulents, always use a soil mix specifically formulated for them. Many potting mixes have time release plant food, but eventually will need additional fertilizer.

The third requirement is water, not too much, not too little, but just the right amount. Generally, water your plants when the top couple inches of the soil feel dry. Signs of overwatering include soil that never dries out, mushy stems or leaves, yellow or brown spots in the center of leaves or the presence of pests. Signs of underwatering include leaves with dry or brown spots on the edges or soil so dry it shrinks away from the pot. Wilting plants could mean either over or underwatering. Underwatered succulents, while unusual, look dull and limp but are not mushy. They straighten up and their color brightens within a couple days of being watered.

When you buy a new plant, decide first where you want to keep the plant and buy one suited to the light level. For bright direct light, cacti and other succulents are ideal. Local garden centers have wide varieties of interesting plants that will thrive in your sunniest windows. I especially like the Flapjack Plant (*Kalanchoe luciae*) for its shape and colors and Frizzle Sizzle (*Albuca Spiralis*) for its corkscrew leaves. For bright indirect or medium light, I choose Philodendron type plants for their interesting leaves, rapid growth and easy care.

For low light areas, I like the Snake Plant (*Dracaena trifasciata*) and the ZZ plant (*Zamioculcas zamiifolia*), for their interesting shapes and colors as well as the fact that they thrive even when neglected.

One final caution about indoor gardening, if you have pets that like to nibble plants, be sure that none of your indoor plants are toxic to them.

SaddleBrooke/SaddleBrooke Ranch Master Gardeners are volunteers trained under the auspices of the University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension, Pinal County. We offer educational programs and classes to residents of our communities.