



Cedar Rim Nursery

Class Bulletin

Class # 2

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How To Care For Your Tropicals

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A: Light requirements:

Plants in their native habitats have vastly differing amounts of light needed to keep them healthy. Some dry-land dwellers such as cacti, and succulents require full sun for several hours of the day. Thus they will need to be placed in a south or west window. Most of our houseplants are a bit tender, and like our skin their foliage may burn if exposed to direct sunlight especially in the summer months. The best locations for palms, figs, and many others tends to be directly in an east window, or placed just out of the direct sun in a south or west window. Some lower light tolerant plants like ferns and peace lilies will survive in a north window.

One fairly reliable rule of thumb is based on leaf colour. The darker the green of the leaf, the darker the location the plant will tolerate. For plants with variegated foliage, they do best away from direct sun.

Avoid low light areas, as plants will survive in them for a short time but will stop growing new leaves causing them to wither and die over time. We recommend using a light meter, which is an inexpensive tool that will help you figure out how bright a spot really is. With this information and a good book on

houseplants or with the help of your favorite nursery worker you will be able to find plants that will thrive in your home.

B: Temperature & humidity requirements:

Temperature is one of the easiest parts of tropical plant keeping. The normal house is kept around 23c, which is an ideal temperature for our houseplants. The only major point here is to avoid placing plants in spots that are exposed to drafts of air from opening window & doors, and to avoid placing plants near heating registers. Many plants will survive in hotter spots if the humidity is kept higher.

In most houses the air is quite dry in comparison with most plants natural homes. There are a few easy ways to increase the humidity around our plants, misting house plants daily in the morning will help, but it is a short lived benefit. Another method is to place the plant's pot on a pebble filled tray, which contains water. This will allow the water to evaporate around the plant without leaving the plant standing in water.

C: Watering requirements:

There is no set schedule for watering plants. In hotter weather when the plant is actively growing some plants may require daily watering (or more often). While in the winter when the plants are not growing and temperatures are lower some plants may only need to be watered as little as once a month. The best tool for checking if water is needed is attached to your hand. Insert a finger about 2-3cm (1inch) into the soil. If the soil feels damp then watering is not needed. If the soil feels dry then give it a drink. When watering keep pouring until the water has gone all the way through the pot and is running out the bottom, this will ensure that all of the root system is getting the water it needs. When you are done pour out any extra water from the tray. This will prevent root rot from the plant sitting in water.

D: Feeding your plants:

From October through March, use 'Oxygen Plus' fertilizer with every second watering. This is a mild solution, which includes a minute amount of hydrogen peroxide. This will release oxygen into the soil helping the roots breath and prevent rot. From April through September use an all-purpose water-soluble plant fertilizer such as Schultz 10-15-10 with every watering.

E: Pests and diseases:

There are an assortment of insects and diseases that attack tropical plants. Though it should be remembered that the majority of plant health problems are related to cultural problems such as light, temperature, and water. The most common pests are aphids, mealy bugs, white fly, fungus gnats, spider mites,

and scale insects. Most of these can be controlled with Safer's Insecticidal Soap, which dries the insect out, and is relatively non-toxic. This is different from household detergents, which contain moisturizers.

Some pests like mites, and scale may require a stronger systemic pesticide to kill them. Fungus gnats require a soil treatment with a specific pesticide for this purpose. A note about fungus gnats: They are like tiny fruit flies in appearance and are usually a sign of over watering. Their larvae live in the soil and require quite a bit of moisture.

The most common disease problems are root rot from over watering, brown leaf tips from under or over watering, black mildew on leaves, and white powdery mildew on the leaves. Aphids excreting sap onto leaves cause the black mildew, then that sap goes moldy. This can be cleaned off with soapy water. White powdery mildew is a fungus that usually is found on plants when leaves are kept damp, and when there is poor air circulation. Again there are specific pesticides for controlling this problem. Other problems such as fungus growing on the soil (including mushrooms) are usually found when poor quality soil is used and the plants are being over watered. The cure for this is to repot the plant removing the poor quality soil and replacing with a premium mix.

F: Repotting:

Plants may need repotting if roots are visible on the surface of the soil, (except with orchids) or are growing out of the holes in the bottom of the pot. Another likely sign that a plant needs repotting is if the soil does not hold much water. This will be evident when you are watering. If the water quickly pours through the pot, and little is retained. You can simply slip the plant out of its pot and have a look at the root, if you find a solid root mass then it is time to repot.

To repot, choose a new pot that is one size larger than the current one, which is approximately 2" larger in size. Placing plants in too large of a pot will make it difficult to water properly and the plant will put all of its energy into developing new roots with no new top growth until the roots have grown to touch the sides of the pot again.

Purchase a quality indoor potting soil; some are now available with fertilizers in them. You will also need small rock or broken pieces of old pots

To repot, place your hand(s) on the soil and turn the pot over. Next lift the old pot off the roots. Loosen or cut any circling roots before placing in the new pot. Put some small rocks in the bottom for drainage, then a little soil in the new pot; place the root ball in, then add soil in around the sides. Pack in firmly, but don't

pack it too hard. Do not raise the level of the soil on the top of the root ball. Then water and place your plant back in its original location. Remember with the new soil and larger pot your plant may not need as much water as it did before. Also do not fertilize a newly transplant plant for the first month, as this will allow the plant to develop new feeder roots.

G: Cleaning leaves:

To clean leaves use a mild soap solution and a cloth to carefully wipe the leaves clean. Afterwards use a leaf shine product. This will give leaves a glossy appearance, and will help repel dust, and allows the plant to take in light and oxygen.

A happy plant is a healthy plant!