Winter Care of Houseplants

During the short days of fall and winter, houseplant growth slows, and changes how we care for them. Although frequent watering may have been necessary during the summer, the same amount now could cause problems. Excess water fills air spaces within the soil, resulting in roots that receive less oxygen than they need. Water only when the soil is dry to touch, not by the calendar. If the soil is dry an inch deep, it is time to water. Be sure to add enough so that some water flows out the bottom of the pot. This will help wash out excess salts that tend to accumulate within the potting soil.

Fertilization should also be reduced. Fertilize your houseplants with ½ the strength recommended on the fertilizer container from October through March. We want to encourage healthy plants not growth during these months. Too much fertilizer results in plants becoming leggy and weak.

Consider the location of your plants this time of year. Since days are short, it may help to move houseplants to areas of the room that receive more light, such as a south-or west-facing window. Do not re-pot or cut back plants during the winter, as this tends to encourage growth when light levels aren’t adequate to support that growth.

Most plants prefer temperatures in the 65º-75ºF range. Temperatures below 50ºF will result in chilling damage to foliage plants. Avoid placing plants where drafts from doors or direct output from heating ducts may contact them.

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