

Provide a little bit of the tropics for your houseplants this winter

Most indoor plants (houseplants) originated in tropical areas of the world. They did not originate inside of a building.

The humidity in most homes is well below the forty to sixty percent that these tropical plants prefer. The lower humidity causes plants to lose water through their leaves faster than they should.

One way to correct this is to install a humidifier, which will add several gallons of water to the air each day. But is it worth the cost to satisfy a few tropical plants? A less expensive option is to place potted plants on a two or three inch bed of moist gravel contained in a shallow, waterproof container. Add water as needed. But make sure the pots are sitting on the gravel, not in the water. Spraying plants with a fine mist of water may temporarily alleviate the problem of low humidity. But you'd have to mist so often that it really is not practical.

The portions of the visible light spectrum that are most useful for plant growth are blue and red. Sunlight contains these and all other rainbow hues. But plants located in a dark room, where they receive little or no sun, need a combination of supplemental light. Blue is produced by fluorescent lamps and red by incandescent bulbs. Plants that receive some sunlight each day may need only extra blue light from a fluorescent source. Too much red light may stimulate undesirable leggy growth. It's important to maintain the proper balance.

Suddenly bringing a plant inside after it has been accustomed to outdoor light may result in the plant dropping many of its leaves. If possible, gradually move the plant from high light to low light locations. This allows the plant to better adjust to the lower light situation. But this can be tricky. So some trial and error may be necessary. The plant will let you know if you got it right.

Temperature is another critical factor. Most plants grow better if the nighttime temperature is lower than the daytime temperature. However, many people try to maintain a fairly even indoor temperature, both day and night. Most plants do well when the temperature is about 65 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit during the day and about 10 degrees lower at night. Scientists have found that a slightly higher daytime light intensity will help compensate for the lack of temperature variation for many plants, though.

To make those indoor plants feel at home this winter try to provide a little bit of the tropics. Good luck.

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