



## House plants

When winter nights are cold, we really appreciate houseplants. For those with desert landscapes, indoor plants might offer the largest amount of green at home.

Most houseplants evolved in areas that experience nothing resembling a winter. These tropical plants are from warm rainforests, which get more precipitation in a month than the Mojave gets in years.

Many of them are fine outdoors until temperatures drop. Then it is critical to bring those tender plants inside. After that, they need more attention.



The following holds true whenever bringing a plant indoors, even one purchased from a nursery. Look at the leaves, including the undersides and the junctions of stem and leaf. Those are places where pesky insects often take up residence. If you see fluffy little patches of white underneath or at the leaf-stem junction, it could be mealybugs. Tiny insects on the underside of leaves are frequently aphids. You can get rid of them with insecticidal soap and water, maybe doctored with rubbing alcohol. The soap destroys the connection between the insect and

leaf; the water washes them off, and the alcohol kills them.

Sometimes a plant has grown so much during the warm period that it seems too big in the living room. In that case, prune and pinch back! Give the cuttings to relatives and neighbors who will be grateful.

You might also need to repot some.

Indoors, plants need light. They were in bright sunshine outdoors, even under shade. Relative to outdoor light, a bright home seems dim. They need adjustment time, and will probably lose a number of leaves in the process. Plants drop leaves for many reasons. Some resent being moved. The transitions from long to short days outside, then long days inside, can be a shock to the system. They recover, if they get light, decent soil, and water.

They should be watered as often as they were outside. When the heat is on, our houses can be **even drier** than in the summer. It is counterintuitive, but true.

When I teach Master Gardener classes, I joke a plant's first mission is to be eaten. Edible houseplants are so easy, especially leafy greens and herbs.

It is simple to take cuttings from basil outdoors, root them in water and put them in small pots on a kitchen window sill with bright north light. It is not enough to make pesto, but enough for a lovely fresh basil flavor.

I had some extra parsley seed that I started in a pot. Not having soaked the seeds first, they were slow to germinate. Still, I have a little pot of fresh green parsley, enough to use as a garnish.



*Basil*

The tiny garlic cloves at the inside of the bulb are too small to bother peeling. Put them in a pot and use the leaves the same as chives. Research finds garlic repels insects and fungal pests, so you can put them in other houseplants, which will not smell.

Houseplants are bright, green, and cheery, and some are both low maintenance and **edible**. Something to try in your happy New Year.

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