

Indoor plants

Bonsai



You want plants for their beauty or other qualities, like their taste or air purifying properties, but you cannot change the ecology of your whole neighborhood in order to get them. You may not have the space or time to create an outdoor garden. That probably means you want potted plants.

People have been growing plants in containers for hundreds and hundreds of years. From bonsai tended by dedicated Japanese artisans in the 1700's, to aspidistra in the corners of Victorian parlors, to bougainvillea hanging in chic restaurants, potted plants provide a chance to grow something in a manageable way. Plants that otherwise would not even survive can thrive in containers.

Perhaps you want a plant that does poorly outdoors in a desert environment. It may require rich, or an acidic, soil. Or it wants more shade than you can reasonably provide outdoors.

A potted plant is a mini-garden, whether an orchid or a philodendron.

Each one has its own ideal environment. All depend on light, soil and water. You should ask: how much light does this plant need; will it get the right amount? Will it be too hot? If everything will be grown in a south facing window, you will probably have problems with plants that require filtered light. Those leaves can develop sunburn, which leads to disease. Other plants must have bright light.

Keep leaves clean of dust. Outside, the wind cleans them off. Indoors, dust settling on leaves blocks the light that they receive. Do not use leaf polishes; a healthy leaf has its own level of shininess, which it uses to obtain optimal light.

The next essential component in plant growth is soil (or other potting medium) and the pot that contains it. It holds moisture and is a source of nutrients. The potting mix must be disease free, so unless you can sterilize it, do not re-use it with a new plant. Throw the old soil outside, where sun and microorganisms can work on it.

The soil is where roots grow. Roots are the channels through which plants obtain nutrients. Unlike in a field or yard, a potted plant has a very small area to produce roots. If that space is too small the plant may not get enough nutrients and water. To move a plant from a smaller pot to a larger one, gently loosen the root ball so roots can grow into the larger pot. There must be drainage so the plant is not sitting in water. In general, the smaller the pot, the more often it needs to be watered, and unglazed clay pots dry faster than plastic ones. Always thoroughly wash and rinse used pots.

Nothing lives without water. Never let your plant dry out completely. As you can imagine, an orchid wants much water. Cacti and succulents can tolerate lack of moisture well, but even they must be watered occasionally.

If the plant has been in a pot for more than about six months, give it a low strength fertilizer on a regular basis.

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Orchid

