

Plants under lights

While quite a few beautiful indoor gardens are on the Las Vegas strip, there is no reason not to create one at your own place.



Photo taken in Horticulture Lab at the Lifelong Learning Center

pot indoors. Not necessarily true; light, water, pets, any of these can shorten a plant's life.

For folks who have had bad experiences with living ones, silk plants might seem like the answer. These are not bad, but they are not alive. Although they do not need watering, you have to wash them frequently. Living houseplants, in pots with potting mix, water and light rarely need dusting.

Many houseplants come from the humid tropics, where light is filtered through a leaf canopy on trees. The light they received when they were out in the wild might not be much brighter than the amount they get in a bright east window at your house, or an office with fluorescent lights. For potted plants being grown for their leaves, fluorescent lamps, even compact fluorescents in regular light fixtures, are fine. For leaf production, the amount of light matters most.

For flower production you need to invest in "grow lights", bulbs with a coating that produces a more reddish purple light. Those wavelengths promote flowering.

Fluorescent lights can make people look less attractive, but from a plant's perspective, they are fine. Besides having enough light for growth, they are cool. You will not be burned by touching a fluorescent bulb that has been on for hours. You can put your plants close to them and leaves will not get burned.

Growing plants under lights is intimidating to some people. Of course, there are quite a number of Southern Nevadans who are nervous about growing things **outdoors**.

That is a reason either for keeping a lawn, or going to a rock **zero-scape** - the "lunar surface look".

People tell me they have the dreaded "black thumb" - when a plant dies they think it is entirely their fault, especially when it is in a



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Do not rely on regular incandescent lights with your plants because of the heat, although you can buy incandescent grow lights. If you use them, keep them far enough away so leaves are not scorched. In research greenhouses, we used high intensity halogen lamps. These get hot, so you have to keep the plants a safe distance from them. They are also expensive to run and to buy.

How much is **enough** light? It depends on the plant. Shade lovers will be content with less than those from open areas. Plants tend to be flexible around this, but look at them. Are the stems starting to look unusually long, with few leaves? That is often an indication of insufficient light; you need to add a lamp or move the plant to a different location.

Do not keep the lights on 24 hours a day. Did you ever hear that something seemed to grow overnight? Plants actually do some of their **most interesting** work in the dark. They grow in the dark, after they have received enough light to make the raw materials.

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