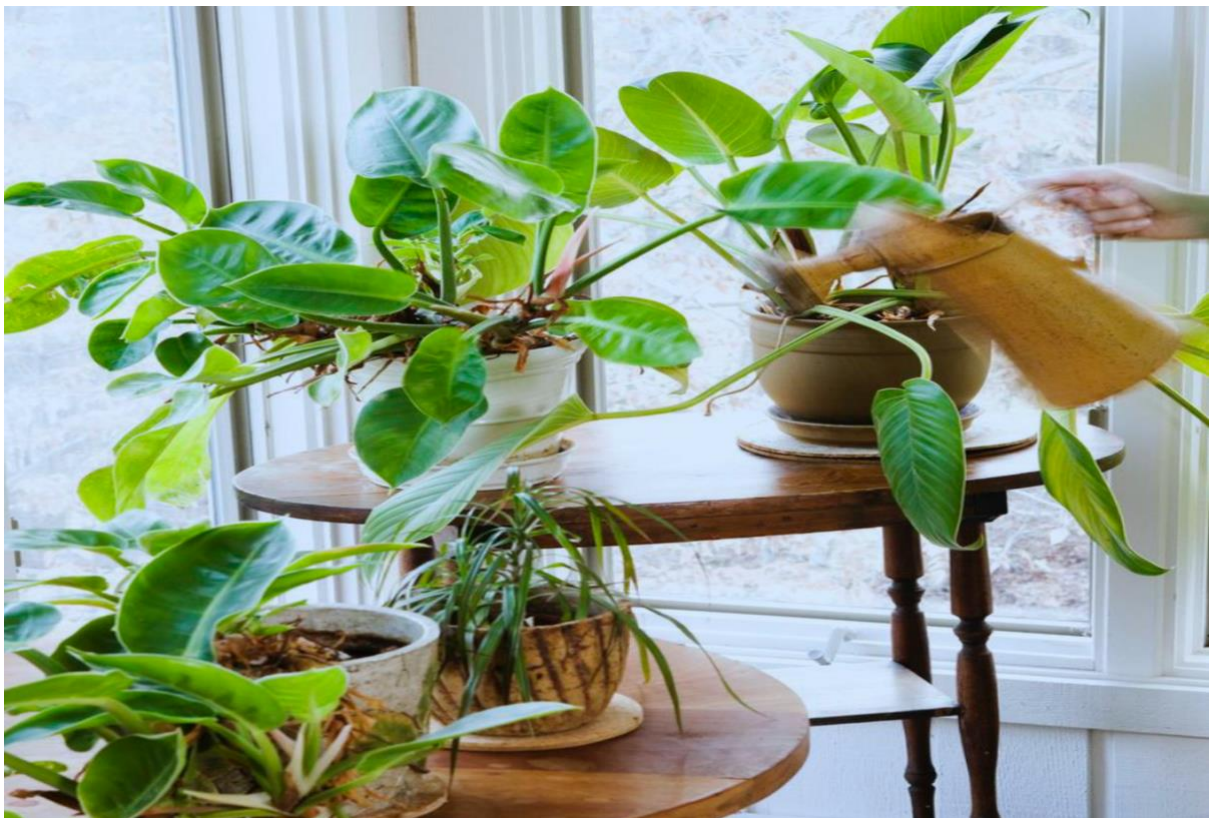


Keep your indoor plants thriving through winter

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Winter can be hard on your indoor plants, but it doesn't have to be. With a little care, your indoor plants can thrive in winter as well as they do in the warmer months.

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Sunlight and Your Indoor Plants

If you live in a subtropical or tropical environment, you don't have to do much to keep your indoor plants thriving through winter. In temperate or colder areas, you need to take more precautions. In any climate, remember the sun is lower during the winter months. You may need to move your plants to give them the sunlight they need.

The sun is not as intense in winter as it is in summer. You need to make sure all your indoor plants get at least a couple of hours of direct sunlight to keep them healthy. In the summer months, direct sunlight can harm some plants, but the milder sunlight of winter will be beneficial to them.

Heat and Cold

Since your house is usually heated during the winter months, it may not seem like the cooler outdoor temperatures are a problem. Plants do not do their best if they're subjected to blasts of heat and cold.

The problem with indoor plants in winter can be in their positioning. If your plants are too close to a heat source, they can be overheated. Also avoid putting them too close to an area that gets blasts of cold air. A plant near your front or back door may be exposed to cold air when you open and close the doors. Also avoid placing plants near windows that you may open for fresh air.

If the leaves touch a window, they may get a shock of cold air and turn brown. Keep your plants far enough away from the window to avoid this common winter problem.

Try to place your indoor plants in an area that stays at a relatively constant temperature. Of course, it may be cooler at night when you turn the heat down. That is natural for plants. What they don't like is rapid changes in temperature.

If you live in a colder area, avoid planting your indoor plants directly into a ceramic or terracotta pot. These pots absorb cold air and will make the soil cold. Try doubling up with a plastic container covered by a more attractive ceramic or terracotta pot.

Watering Your Indoor Plants

In the cooler months, plants go dormant and don't need as much watering as they do in the hotter months. You don't want to starve them of water, but you don't want to overwater them, either.

Your heater will dry out the soil, so to establish a watering schedule, test the soil occasionally. If the soil is dry, it's time to water. If it's still moist, don't water. You will discover how often you need to water if you test the soil occasionally. You may be surprised. For many plants, once a fortnight is enough during the winter months.

While you're watering or testing the soil, look for dust on the leaves of your plants. Dusty or dirty leaves can't absorb as much light as clean leaves. If there is dust on the leaves, you can dust them off with a moist cloth. Another way to clean your plants is to give them an occasional shower. Use cold water and don't place them too close to the shower head. A cold shower will be like a refreshing rain for your indoor plants. For plants with shiny leaves, try a 50-50 mixture of water and milk. The milk will help keep the leaves glossy.

If your plant leaves start to turn yellow, it's usually a sign that you're overwatering or underwatering. It can also be an indication of under nourishment. You will have to determine the cause, but yellowing leaves aren't a "death sentence." Discover the cause and your plants will thrive again.

If you're leaving the home for an extended period, you won't be able to water your plants. One way to give them the water they need is to put them in trays and fill the trays with water. As the soil dries, it will absorb the water in the trays.

Fertilisers and Pesticides

A slow release fertiliser will help your indoor plants thrive. It won't, however, prevent disease or infestation. The problem with chemical pesticides indoors is that they can pollute the atmosphere.

Use more natural methods to control pests. Some natural pesticides include diluted:

Natural dishwashing liquid

Neem oil

Citrus oil with a dash of cayenne pepper
Onion and garlic spray

Read *Garden Pest Control: What are Your Options?* for some tips. Natural pesticides work indoors as well as outdoors. While natural solutions are always better, it's particularly important not to use chemical pesticides indoors, where they could be a health hazard in a confined environment.

The Best Winter Indoor Plants

Some plants thrive better in a winter environment. They can be a delightful addition to your indoor plants and add cheer to your home. Some will even flower in winter.



What are some of the best winter indoor plants?

Cacti are desert plants, but deserts get very cold in winter. Most cacti will thrive throughout the year. They only need watering about once a month and don't even need good soil to thrive.

Cyclamen likes a cool, sunny and airy position. It is an easy to maintain plant that thrives in winter.

Polyanthus grow well indoors. You can choose from a variety of flower colours. They will blossom in winter and can be a welcome addition to your indoor plants.

Phalaenopsis are better known as orchids or "moth orchids." Like Polyanthus, they are available in a variety of colours. They will grow in low light and only need watering about every two weeks. A few tablespoons of water is all they need.

Any or all of these plants will add winter cheer to your home. Better yet, they are all relatively easy to grow. Try a few cacti, but put them some place where children won't accidentally rub against or fall into them.

Cacti come in all sizes and shapes. Some have bulbous "flowers" while others come in pleasing shapes and different shades of green.

It's Easy to Keep Your Indoor Plants Thriving Through Winter

Really, it's easy to make your indoor plants thrive through winter. Just as during the summer months, they need water and fertiliser. In winter, you may have to move them to give them more sun. The same window that may bake a plant in summer may be ideal in winter.

The main precaution you need to take in winter is positioning. Most of your indoor plants will need light. They also need a place where they aren't subjected to fluctuating temperatures. Just as outdoor plants need a fairly stable environment, so do your indoor plants. If you live in a colder area, make sure they aren't overheated and then subjected to blasts of cold air.

Remember to use non-chemical pesticides if possible. Chemical pesticides may be harmful to your family. If you do use them, use them in a well ventilated area and wear protective gloves and a face mask. Take these steps and your winter indoor plants will brighten even the cloudiest of days.