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Why are my houseplants not growing very fast?

This is a typical winter question that I receive calls and e-mails about.

For many house plant species that are found in our homes, winter is a time of rest and little, if no growth.

Few houseplant species bloom or change color outside of poinsettias, holiday cacti, African violets, and a few others.

For the majority of other houseplants, there is no need to be alarmed about this decreased level of growth.

Proper houseplant care in the winter is just as important as other seasons.

Healthy houseplants will enter the spring growing season ready to grow and thrive for the rest of the year.

Here are some simple tips to follow when caring for houseplants in the winter.

- Many houseplants prefer to be in location with a daytime temperature between 65 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit during the day, and between 60 and 65 degrees Fahrenheit during the night.
- Place plants away from hot or cold drafts, touching cold windows, heat sources, fireplaces or on top of TV sets.

The heat can rapidly dry out plants faster than most consumers will notice.

The cold can also damage plants as well since most of them originally come from warm and humid climates.

- Humidity in the home is another concern during the winter. Ideally, most houseplants like about 40 to 50 percent humidity to grow and thrive.

Humidity levels drop in winter, often below 20 percent, which is too low for most houseplants.

- Using home humidifiers in rooms where the houseplants reside will help increase the relative humidity. Grouping or massing houseplants together for display purposes also helps raise the humidity level with moisture escaping from the potting media.
- Place saucers under each plant with gravel or decorative rock. Fill the saucer with water.

As the water evaporates, the humidity will increase in the immediate area.

- Water houseplants until water runs out of bottom of the container to completely hydrate the potting media.
- Cacti and succulents should be allowed to dry out completely before another watering.

Fern species on the other hand prefer even moisture all the time.

In general, most house plants need to be watered thoroughly, and be allowed to dry out some. This level is somewhere in between the needs of cacti and ferns.

- Probe the potting mix in the container to a depth of two inches with a dry index finger to feel how moist or dry the plant is before watering.

If the soil is dry to the touch or slightly moist, it is time to water the houseplants again.

- Many houseplants do not grow or utilize fertilizer during the winter. For many species, this is a time of slow growth or rest. Resume fertilization in late March.
- Over time, dust and other grime can accumulate on the leaves of houseplants. Use a soft dish rag or sponge soaked with lukewarm water to help remove the dust and grime.
- Do not clean African violet leaves with water. If the water is cooler than the surface temperature of the leaves, dead spots can form from the water.

Simply use a dry dish rag or an old toothbrush to brush off the dust or residue.

If you have any questions about winter house plant care, please contact me at [dlott2@unl.edu](mailto:dlott2@unl.edu), by calling (308) 532-2683, or by contacting your local University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Office.