



BLACK THUMB PLANT CARE

If you've never had luck with house plants, you've probably been practicing at least one of the following "Don'ts" of plant care.



Don't...

...water without **feeling the soil** to determine its degree of dryness and don't allow the roots to stand in water. Plants' water needs vary by species, with the environment, and with the season of the year; constantly saturating the soil with water results in a damaging lack of oxygen for the root system.

...pot a **small plant** in a **large container**, thinking the plant will "grow into it." A small root system cannot handle the amount of moisture a large pot of soil will retain; an increase in pot diameter of one or two inches is sufficient.

...move a house plant **directly into full sun** outside. Plants, like people, will sunburn; damaged leaves will not recover, but new growth should come out normally. Also, avoid the burning effect of direct sun shining through car windows when transporting a new plant.

...water with **cold water**, or let ice cubes melt on the surface of a potted plant. Warm or tepid water is more readily absorbed by the root ball; cold water stresses warm climate plants, and cold water on the leaves can cause spotting or fungal problems.

...clean or **shine a plant's leaves** with anything but a commercial leaf shine. The surface of a leaf has tiny pores used in transpiration (the release of excess water from the plant's foliage) and gas exchanges, both affecting photosynthesis; clogging these pores can severely damage or kill the plant. Some plants have shiny leaves, and others do not. An occasional shower of tepid water over the foliage will keep the plant looking naturally healthy.

...use fertilizers in larger concentrations or more frequently than recommended on the product label. **Too much fertilizer** will build up in the soil, resulting in a toxic amount of salts which can burn roots and foliage. For the same reason, do not apply fertilizers when a plant is dormant or resting (usually during the winter months), as the plant will not be using it, and it may accumulate to toxic levels.

...automatically **spray pesticides** on a plant that is not "thriving". Without diagnosing the problem, you may treat the plant for a disease or pest it does not have, or use a product that will not do the trick; the wrong chemical is a waste of money, fosters resistance to pesticides, and is an unnecessary health and environmental hazard.

When purchasing a new plant, ask for information on light, temperature, humidity, water, and fertilizer requirements. Check the soil daily for a week or two, to determine how fast the plant is drying. Look your plants over on a regular basis, and seek help with any problems right away.