



LOWER LIGHT PLANTS

While most indoor plants require at least partly sunny locations to thrive, there are a few house plants that will tolerate the lower light available from windows heavily shaded by trees, roof overhangs, sheer curtains and blinds, or the light from ceiling-mounted fluorescent lights.

Plants growing without the stimulus of bright light tend to grow more slowly and generally do not dry out as quickly. They will not need fertilizing or repotting as often. Selecting an appropriate plant for a lower light location can mean less maintenance.

Here are some suggested plants that will tolerate lower light levels. The care instructions are appropriate to medium to lower light conditions. All of these can be grown in bright indirect light, as well.

Aglaonema (**CHINESE EVERGREEN**) is a spreading bushy plant that likes to dry to about one-quarter to one-third the depth of the soil between waterings. Do not let the roots stand in water. It will not tolerate cold temperatures (minimum 65°F). There are many varieties of leaf color and variegation. These plants are commonly used by the interiorscape industry because of their tolerance of less-than-ideal growing conditions.

Aspidistra (**CAST-IRON**) is a Victorian Era plant that gets its common name from its tolerance of abuse and neglect, as well as lower light. The soil should dry moderately between waterings. Mites are the most likely pest problem, so occasional showers will help keep the Cast-iron clean. *Aspidistra* may survive our milder winters if planted outside in a sheltered, shady location, such as a walled city garden.

Caryota (**FISHTAIL PALM**) prefers higher humidity and should be kept evenly moist, the surface soil only drying between waterings. Foliar-feed periodically to keep this plant a deep green color. When the Fishtail palm is ready to be repotted, do not disturb the roots, simply set the old root ball into its new container and fill in with new media. If the plant is not too large, give it a “shower” every few weeks when it is time to water.

Chamaedorea elegans ‘*Neanthe Bella*’ (**PARLOR PALM**) is a small, graceful palm that likes to dry partially between waterings, but appreciates having its leaves misted several times a week to discourage mites. Mist early in the day so that leaves do not sit wet overnight. A dwarf palm reaching only about 4’, the parlor palm is a favorite in dish gardens.

Cissus rhombifolia (**GRAPE IVY**) is a fast-growing trailing plant. Soil should dry moderately between waterings, and avoid getting water on the leaves, as Grape ivy is prone to powdery mildew in high humidity or poor air circulation. In addition to the holly-shaped leaves of this *Cissus*, the Oak ivy (*C. rhombifolia* ‘**Ellen Danica**’) has attractive deeply lobed leaves. If the plant becomes leggy, cut the vines back and let it fill out again.

Dracaena deremensis ‘*Janet Craig*’, commonly called just “Janet Craig”, tolerates very low light, but is sensitive to the fluoride in our water systems. Let water stand 24 hours or longer before watering, so the undesirable chemicals can “gas” out. The “Janet Craig” likes to get moderately dry between waterings. Care is the same for the ‘**Janet Craig**’ **compacta**, with its dark green, short compact leaves. Avoid letting water collect in leaf axils, where it can cause damage.

Dracaena deremensis ‘*Warneckii*’, like the “Janet Craig”, should be allowed to dry moderately between waterings. As with all dracaenas, use day-old or rain water at room temperature to prevent fluorine damage. In addition to the white-striped ‘*Warneckii*’, try the yellow-striped ‘**Goldstar**’.

Epipremnum aureum (**GOLDEN POTHOS**) is an easy lower light vine related to the philodendrons. It likes to dry moderately, and should be cut back periodically to encourage fullness. The solid green “**Jade Pothos**” and the white and green variegated “**Marble Queen Pothos**” are also easy.

***Philodendron cordatum* (HEART-LEAF PHILODENRON)** is an old favorite because it is fast-growing, as well as easy to cultivate. Let soil dry partially between waterings, and cut vines back to encourage fullness. Cuttings root easily in water.

***Rhapis excelsa* (LADY PALM)** is a slow-growing, elegant palm. Allow soil to dry slightly between thorough waterings (never allow to dry completely). Mist the leaves occasionally to increase humidity and discourage mite infestations. Do not allow the roots to stand in water.

***Sansevieria* (SNAKE PLANT)** or “Mother-in-law’s tongue”, is tolerant of low light, dry air, and general abuse. Several varieties are available in different variegation and shades of green. Moderately dry to dry soil, with good drainage. Has a very sculptural look and is super easy to grow.

***Spathiphyllum* (PEACE LILY)** is a very popular lower-light tolerant plant for homes, offices and malls. If the light is too low, it will just serve as a green plant. Increased light levels and higher humidity produce more flowering. Soil should be kept evenly moist, but not soggy. Remove spent flowers as their color fades. There are many nice varieties available.

***Syngonium* (ARROW-HEAD PLANT)** or “Nephthytis” is a vining lower-light plant, that will need periodic pruning to maintain its fullness. A wide variety of leaf colors is available in this low maintenance house plant.

***Zamioculcas zamifolia* (“ZZ”)** looks like a cycad, but is, in fact, a relative of the Peace Lily. It is a super easy, dry-air, lower-light tolerant plant that can only be “done in” by freezing or over watering it.

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