

Our Ultimate Guide to Indoor Plants

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Indoor plants are a great addition to any indoor space. Whether it be [your office space](#) or your home, adding some indoor plants can dramatically change your space. Keep reading for our Ultimate Guide to Indoor Plants.

So let's start with the most simple question...Why?

Lookin' Good!

The number one reason for most people is that indoor plants can look great! Add some creative elements to your indoor space by using feature pots and containers, or hanging baskets with indoor plants. Pots and flowers can add colour to an otherwise bland spot.

Plant foliage and different styles of pots for your plants can add texture, and nothing beats the contrast of a deep vivid green against a plain white wall.

Think outside the box in the way you prepare your indoor plants too! A clear vase with coloured pebbles or a few succulents in some old coffee cups or even wine corks can be super effective as a feature.

Improving the Air Quality.

You probably know that plants and trees outside absorb and filter a whole lot of pollution and carbon dioxide from our air, but did you know that they can do the exact same thing indoors?

Unfortunately, unless you live in a remote, secluded mountain retreat, you're going to get a lot of pollution drifting into your home whenever you open your windows or doors.

To make things even worse, this then mixes with all the rubbish air that things inside your home or office produce. Most appliances and plastics emit volatile organic compounds or VOC's, and they aren't great to breath in. If you've got painted walls, or stained timber, or even do a lot of cooking, you've got these VOC's.

If you work in a busy office, you could also have some pretty high levels of carbon dioxide from peoples breathing as well as any little nasties that are caught up in your air conditioner filter. Luckily, indoor plants can fix these problems quick smart!

It's the microorganisms in the soil of indoor plants that are the real heroes, as they can filter out a lot of these VOC's in around 24 hours. Through photosynthesis in the leaves, the plant will also absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen back into the area, meaning more fresh and clean air for everyone!



Reduce noise.

Ever noticed that an empty room seems louder than when it's full? This is because there is nothing there to absorb sound waves as they vibrate around the room. In a crowded office, using potted plants as screens or buffers between areas can be a great way to keep conversations where they need to be, rather than heard office wide.

Having a bunch of potted plants at an open window can also act as a natural barrier to any noise outside that would otherwise find its way into your ears, leaving you to concentrate on the task at hand.



Reducing Sick Building Syndrome.

For those of you scratching your head at this term, Sick Building Syndrome (SBS) is basically a theory that generally healthy occupants of a 'sick' building can suffer some pretty bad health and comfort issues, that seem to be directly linked to time spent inside that building. It is thought that these issues are caused by poor ventilation, and air pollution and contaminants. There's also debate whether work place satisfaction and work place stress are also contributing factors to SBS. By using indoor plants, SBS can be reduced by clearing the air of contaminants, improving air quality, and increasing the aesthetic appearance of the area, making it a happier place to be and hopefully reducing stress!

So you've decided now that you just can't live anymore without some indoor plants in your life. But how do we grow them?

There are 5 main influences on indoor plant health that need to be considered to ensure optimum plant health; Light, temperature, what it's planted in, water, and humidity.

Light.

This is the most important thing to consider when buying an indoor plant. Through photosynthesis plants create sugars, which are used for energy in plant functions. In low light, less sugars are made, meaning that there may not be enough to go around to all the functions that plant needs. Generally, low light will mean less growth, smaller leaves, and lighter green foliage. If no photosynthesis occurs, then there is no available energy for anything, and your indoor plant is a goner.

Therefore, it's vital that you select a plant that will suit the available light of the area you want to put it. Luckily, nurseries know this, and put all the important details on the plant label.

It's important to note also, that in a place like an office, some artificial light can be used to supplement light requirements, and the long hours that these lights are on for (usually longer than average daylight hours) means that the overall *total* light received may be enough, even though it's at a lower intensity. To put it simply, a plant that needs exposure to 4 hours of direct (100% intensity) sun light to survive, could get by with 8 hours at 50% intensity, say from a window and some office lights. Make sense? But be careful here too, because too much light can be bad for some plants. Researching your species will pay off here big time.



Temperature.

In Australia, it's going to be pretty unlikely that your indoor plants will suffer from stress due to cold temperatures. Even in the coldest parts during Winter, indoor temperatures should be ok for indoor plants. The more important issue we face is from the heat and you need to figure this out before you go any further with your indoor plants.

If your indoor plants are sitting in an area with a high temperature, you will have more transpiration and respiration occurring in your plants leaves as they try to stay cool. Think of this like sweating. This means more demand for those important sugars produced during photosynthesis, which can mean that your plant is using all its energy just on staying cool, rather than growing, which will decrease the plants performance.

Really hot temperatures can physically burn the plant, so probably don't go placing any near a heater or open fire place.

Again, check the label of your plant when you purchase, or do a quick internet search of the best conditions for your favourite plant.

Potting medium.

Whatever your plant is sitting in is as important as where it sits in your room. Good planting mediums provide stability, oxygen, minerals and moisture to the roots. It's important to get your medium right for your plant, as some species require specific mixes. This doesn't necessarily have to be soil either. Hydroponic set-ups can use gravel, marbles, and anything else that can fill a space, they just require more attention to ensure adequate nutrients are present.

You can also get some pretty cool epiphytic plants that you can grow indoors. These bad boys get their moisture and nutrients from the air, so need nothing more than a quick mist each day to keep happy.



Water.

The absolute number one killer of indoor plants is too much water. It's really important you learn how much water each specific plant you have needs, and it may take a little time to figure this out. This will depend on the species, what it is planted into, the size of the plant, the temperature around it, light levels, and humidity.

Each of these things will either affect the water demand, and the moisture available. Obviously a bigger plants will take up more water than smaller ones, and plants in hot areas with full sun will need more moisture available than a plant in a cool shady area. Getting it right can be tough, but some prior research, common sense and a bit of trial and error will help you along.

Too much water will decrease the available oxygen to the root zone, meaning a rapid decrease in plant health, as well as potential for rotting. Too little water and, well we all know what happens here; floppy plants and crispy leaves. A great rule of thumb is the old finger trick. Stick it into the soil, if it's dry give it some water.

Hot tip as well; Avoid sitting your pots in trays or saucers. These can increase the build up of salts in your soil, which are trying to be expelled from the root zone. This is not good for your plants. If you have to have them in trays, make sure you refresh the water regularly.

Humidity.

Humidity is one of those factors that is harder to control, but can have a serious impact on the health of your indoor plant. Essentially, humidity refers to the the amount of moisture contained within the air. The lower the relative humidity of an area, the more transpiration that can occur in the plant and soil, which results in more moisture usage and quicker drying out. Air conditioners generally blow out very dry air with low humidity, which means your office or home indoor plant could have a battle on its hands. The other reason relative humidity is important, is due to the fact that a large amount of indoor plants are from the warm, humid, canopy shaded areas of tropical rainforests and really need this type of environment to thrive.

So how can we change the humidity to suit our indoor plants?
Here's a few easy tips.

First off, placing a lot of plants together can help create a little mini micro climate of humidity. As plants transpire they will increase the humidity of the local area around them. Rotate your plants around every so often to ensure that outside plants get a chance to recuperate.

You can also add some mulch, gravel, or sit your plants in a saucer of water (remembering to refresh the water regularly) to help catch a bit of the moisture you add to keep the area moist.

If you have an office plant on your desk, get a spray bottle and give it a spray every so often. Every time you have a drink of water, mist your desk plant! (In reality, this is not a fix, and needs you there all the time to work, but it can definitely help out.)

Just because they're inside, doesn't mean that your indoor plants don't need a good bit of TLC. They need just as much attention and hard work as any other plant in your backyard. Here are the essentials for maintenance of your indoor plants.

Fertilising.

Plants need nutrients to grow, and you will need to fertilise your indoor plant at some stage during its life. Most indoor plants will love a liquid fertiliser application at least every 6 months. If you really want your plant to flourish, bump it up to 3 times a year; at the end of winter, middle of spring, and beginning of summer. Little by little is the best approach. This will mean that whilst your plant is sending out all its new growth in the warmer months, it will have an ample supply of nutrients to help.

Liquid fertilisers are my recommendation here for a couple of reasons. Firstly, they get deeper into the soil faster. If you want quicker results, then this is way. Slow release fertilisers that you sprinkle on the surface need to be dissolved each time the plant is watered to be effective, and because we're not watering our indoor plants all that often, they'll just sit there and aren't as effective as we need them to be.

For potted plants, in particular indoor plants, it's really important to not over apply synthetic fertilisers. The small amount of soil available can mean that the nutrients accumulate, and can result in burning of your plant. A better alternative is some simple organic matter, like used coffee grounds (high in nitrogen for big green leaves) or simply repotting your plants with really high quality potting mix every year. A new plant with good soil should not need fertilising in its first year, though if you're using something else as your potting medium, you will need to regularly supply.

Your standard fertilisers will give your indoor plants the standard NPK (nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium) which are the vitals for growth and survival. Nitrogen is for creating new tissues and helps with vigorous leaf and stem growth. Phosphorous will help

with good root development, and flower buds, and Potassium with flowers, seeds, and overall plant health.

There are also a whole bunch of other nutrients that plants need in smaller amounts to really thrive. These are referred to as trace element, and are elements like zinc, calcium, boron etc that are needed in smaller quantities, but are still important.

Pruning.

Yes, you can prune your indoor plant.

It's a pretty simple answer to the “when is the right time?” question. Whenever you want to.

Unless your indoor plant has a specific requirement for pruning at a certain time, you can really feel free to do it whenever suits you best. Ideally, you want to be cutting out dead leaves and flower heads as soon as possible to ensure they stay looking fresh, and it's always a good idea to cut back old growth before it dies to give room to the new growth coming through.

You can also consider some directional pruning, which means pruning in a specific way to encourage growth in the desired direction. Got a plant that is growing straight up, but not filling out in the middle? Nip that top terminal bud and all the growth effort will instead be send to all the lateral pointing growth points. Just remember to always cut just above another growth point or node, to make sure you're not left with an ugly stump.

Finally, you can either pinch off buds and leaves with your finger nails, or cut them using snips.

For either option, it's important to make sure the cut is clean, and your tools or finger nails are free of any chemicals, or gunk which could infect the plant. The cleaner the cut, the lower the shock and the quicker the recovery.

My top picks.

Enough of the how and why, here are my top picks for indoor plants.

Pothos

Air-purifying machine! Really nice long tendrils for hanging pots, or dangling off a table.

Has some pretty interesting variegated leaves and is quite a hardy thing. Loves a bit of sun, and can handle a missed water or two. Will need to be trimmed a bit though to keep those long stems in check.



Succulents.

Cute little indoor plants with a whole heap of charm. There's so many choices when it comes to succulents, and you can be really creative with where you plant them. These guys can sit in the hottest part of your house and be perfectly fine. They will suffer from over watering though, so you need to keep an eye on them and make sure you're not watering them too much. They won't like a lot of humidity though.



Chlorophytum (spider plant)

This one is straight out of your grandmothers garden, and is a really attractive, yet unusual plant. It has long variegated green leaves, and send out tendrils with new leaf and flower buds, meaning it can spread out, or dangle down from a hanging pot. They like a bit of water, and warmer temperatures.



Peace Lily

The go to indoor plant for beginners (I've got a dwarf one that's about 10 years old). These little fellas are pretty hard to kill. They have vivid green leaves and a curved white flower at the end of stalk. Generally likes low humidity and low light, but is tough enough to handle a couple of hours of dappled sun and a bit of humidity in somewhere like a bathroom.



Bamboo Palm

This small little guy is a great palm that you can have in your indoor setting. It's really good at air purification , and can give you a bit of different texture if you're grouping some plants together.



Philodendrons

There's a few different types of philodendrons that you can use indoors. Xanadu is a dwarf version of the classic, with the heavy cut lobes. Another type is the Heart Shaped philodendron. Both these plants are really tough and can handle most spots inside, and like to dry out between watering. They can be used as upright plants in pots, or trailing out of their pots.



Calathea

Calathea have ridiculously cool looking leaves, and are sure to give a compact sized boost to the appearance of any room you put it in.

Keep it in a low light spot, and go easy on the watering, around once a week. The leaves can be so varied in their appearance and colour, so there's really a lot of choice, just be careful not to put them in direct sun, or these leaves will go an ugly shade of brown as they burn.



Hopefully now you have all the info you need to grow some amazing indoor plants of your own, and enjoy all the benefits they can bring to your indoor space.