

Views from VanDeWalle

Brandy VanDeWalle, Extension Educator in Fillmore County

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Houseplants

In Nebraska Extension, educators have areas we specialize within, providing clients the best, current information available. This week, I've decided to feature Nicole Stoner, extension horticulturist for our area with her article on houseplants. The following was written by Nicole who is based out of the Gage County Extension Office.

The winter is a great time for Houseplants. We can't be outside with our plants, especially in the sub-zero temperatures we are seeing right now in Nebraska. However, we can enjoy our houseplants from the warmth and comfort of inside our homes. And now is a great time to go out and purchase a new houseplant, or possibly you will get one as a gift for Valentine's Day.

There are so many great houseplants to choose from. They can be found in a lot of colors, including their foliage colors, some are admired for their greenery and some for their flowers. I have a few, they are all grown primarily for their greenery. Aloe, philodendrons, hoyas, snake plant or Mother-in-law's tongue, and cactus are all plants I enjoy in my office. There are also some great dumbcane plants, African violets, corn plant, and peace lily among many others to choose from.

Houseplant Care

Light is critical for any plant, but houseplants can have real problems if placed in incorrect lighting. In the winter months, plants struggle with poor lighting. Our homes don't provide houseplants with enough light in the winter so you may need to supplement light for proper growth. Be sure to check on the light needs for your houseplants. Plants such as Boston fern, Peace lily, philodendron, and snake plant are tolerant to low light. These plants will "sunburn" if placed in too intense of lighting, causing the leaf or leaf tips to turn tan in color and become papery.

According to Sarah Browning, Lancaster County Extension Educator, South facing windows provide the brightest light, while across the room from a north window is the darkest location. As a comparison, if light intensity near a south window is ranked as 100%, east and west windows provide about 60% as much light intensity, and north windows only provide about 20% light intensity. This should help you decide which window is best for your plant.

If you do not have a window or location near a window with enough light intensity, you may need to supplement the light around your plant. You can purchase plant lights from many stores and online shopping locations.

Sarah Browning also discusses how humidity is another critical care factor for your houseplants. Many houseplants are tropical in nature and our homes are quite dry in comparison, especially in the winter months. Plants need 70-80% humidity for best growth. Increased humidity in the room can be accomplished through the use of a humidifier or by placing plants in bathrooms which are typically more humid. A pebble tray can also be used. Place plants on a tray of pebbles with water among the pebbles, keep the water level below the plant container. Do not leave plants sitting in water, this can lead to root rot issues.

Also, be sure to keep the plants sufficiently watered. Just feeling around in the soil to test for moisture can be an effective way to know when to water. Don't just water weekly on the same day, test the soil first. If the soil feels wet don't water, if it feels dry water the plant. Some plants



will tell you when they need watered with droopy or wilted leaves. Remember, the watering needs of your plants will differ so be sure to water only as needed. Add water until it runs out the drainage holes in the container.

GroBigRed Houseplant Series

If you would like to know more about houseplants, you can gain some great information through an upcoming webinar series from Nebraska Extension. The Houseplants 101 is a free webinar series on Saturdays from February 20-March 6. You can register at go.unl.edu/houseplants101

The schedule is as follows:

- February 20th, 10am- Choosing a Healthy Houseplant & 11am- Picking your plants: Easier & Lower Need Plants
- February 27th, 10am- How do I keep it alive? (Environmental Considerations) & 11am-Fertilizing & Watering
- March 6th, 10am- What's eating my plants? Basic Pest & Disease Management & 11am- Potting and Repotting