

## Indoor Plant Tips

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

Release: Week of December 7, 2020

Houseplant leaves collect dust just like other surfaces in the home. Dust accumulating on the foliage not only affects a plants appearance, but creates a favorable environment for insects and limits plant health.

By washing houseplant leaves with a soft, damp cloth as needed, you not only get rid of dust you may be removing mites or insects as well.

Don't use a feather duster or other fluffy wand to dust houseplants. If there are mites, insects, or insect eggs present, you'll likely end up spreading them from plant to plant.

And while it's important to wash houseplants often enough to eliminate dust, it's not a good idea to mist them frequently.

Moist leaf surfaces allow fungal and bacterial organisms to infect foliage. By keeping leaf surfaces mostly dry, you'll reduce the risk of disease.

When buying a new plant, examine it closely for signs of insects. Check the plant for discolored leaves, fine webbing, or a sticky exudate. And be sure to check the undersides of leaves. Most mites and insects prefer to hang out on leaf undersides.

If a friend offers to give you one of their plants or a cutting from one, examine these the same as those from a store. Don't take a chance on introducing a problem to your indoor plants.

As always, be sure to select houseplants adapted to the indoor environment of your home. Healthy, actively growing plants are better able to fend off insects and diseases.

Foliage plants that do well in most homes are tolerant of lower light and relative humidity levels and warmer air temperatures. This is why the old standbys like pothos, philodendron, dracaenas and dieffenbachia remain popular. They are proven to tolerate the indoor environment.

If a houseplant spent the summer outdoors and is now dropping green leaves, this is likely a sign the plant is readjusting to the indoor growing environment.

Light intensities outdoors are higher than indoors and so leaves develop a thicker cuticle or waxy layer. Indoor plants tend to have thinner cuticles.

When a plant is moved to a different growing environment, it may respond by dropping many of its current leaves and growing new ones.

During this adjustment, avoid fertilizing houseplants. Once you begin to see new growth, then fertilize about once a month or less.

Know that most houseplants are in a semidormant state during winter. They should be fertilized very little if at all during this time. Their soil or potting mix should remain uniformly moist, but never allowed to become and remain too wet.

If a plant has been in the same container for two or more years, consider repotting it into fresh potting mix.

Source: Lancaster County Extension website