

FACT SHEET: Hassle-Free Houseplants

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The Top Five Reasons You Should Buy Houseplants:

Reason # 5 - A plant will beautify your home.

Reason # 4 - A plant will purify the air.

Reason # 3 - A plant will never talk back to you.

Reason # 2 - A plant will love you if you water it.

Reason # 1 - You don't have to walk a philodendron!

The best hassle-free houseplant is one that requires no watering, no fertilizer, no light requirements and minimal grooming. What is it??? Of course, silk or plastic!

Light is the most important requirement. All plants need light whether artificial, filtered or diffused. Variegated leaf plants need more light. Watch your plant's body language. If the leaves appear bleached out, the plant could be receiving too much light. If it is leggy, it could be receiving too little light.

As in real estate, remember the saying: location, location, location. If you want your plant **ALIVE**, it should be in the best location for light in your house. If you want it to **THRIVE**, it may be on a front porch. If you want it to **SURVIVE**, it could be in the worst location in your house. Make sure the houseplant you purchase has a fighting chance. Don't expect a queen palm to thrive in your bathroom.

Water is the 2nd most important requirement. More people kill plants due to over-watering versus under-watering. When it comes to water, less is better for houseplants. The soil in clay pots dries out faster than soil in plastic pots, so you can water less frequently by using plastic pots. Drainage holes in pots help prevent the plant from drowning. Water through the planting material so water flows out of the bottom of the pot. Don't let the plant sit in standing water unless it likes wet feet, like cardinal flower or swamp hibiscus. Water your plants when the soil feels dry 1 inch deep.

When feeding your houseplants, consider the two month rest rule. Don't fertilizer plants you purchase for two months after you purchase them. Generally plants are well fertilized at the nursery or big box store so they look their best when you purchase them. And, when it comes to fertilizer, read the label carefully...then re-read the label carefully. For **THRIVE** and **ALIVE** plants, feeding depends on the degree of hassle-free you want. **SURVIVE** plants never need to be fed unless you are frequently rotating them out of the low light area.

Groom your plants if you want. Remove yellow or brown leaves and trim to the contour of the leaf tip. Rotate your plants so they don't grow lopsided trying to reach the light source. The houseplants presented below are hassle free because they have minimal light, water and food requirements. They also have minor hassles: grooming, rotating and a weekly once-over. The plants are listed in alphabetical order, not hassle-free order.

- **Aspidistra** – Called the **Cast Iron** plant, very drought tolerant, probably the first “houseplant” as we know them today. In Victorian England, no home was complete without an Aspidistra in the parlor.

- **Bromeliad** - Known as air plants, Epiphytes, plants that grows on another plant but do not parasitize it. Be sure there is water in the cup of the plant. After it blooms, a pup will appear, and the mother plant begins to die. A member of the pineapple family. Some require more light than others.
- **Aglaonema** - Called the **Chinese Evergreen**. Variegated members need a little more light. One of NASA's top ten plants for air purification. As a rule of thumb, allow one houseplant per 100 square feet of living area. The more vigorous the plant, the more air it can filter. Keep in mind that plants will not alleviate tobacco smoke in the air.
- **Dracaena** - One of NASA's top 10 air purifying plants. As they **thrive**, they lose their lower leaves. Many different varieties: Corn Plant, Warneckii, Janet Craig.
- **Hoya** - Nicknamed the **Wax Plant** because of the waxy appearance of the leaves and flowers. Lovely in a hanging basket or on a plant stand. Can produce beautiful flower clusters under **thriving** conditions.
- **Palms – Chamaedorea** – Another of NASA's top 10 air purifying plants. **Bamboo Palm** is a favorite interior plant. More than 100 species. Need to stick to the **chamaedorea** family when buying palms for houseplants. Grow 5-7 feet in good interior conditions. Some are single stemmed (Parlor Palm). Others have multiple trunks.
- **Philodendron - Heartleaf** is the most **common** indoor foliage plant. Most are vines and love to climb. Trim them back for bushy growth. Another NASA top 10 air purifying plants. Heart-leaved Philodendron dates back to the Victorian age when people first became interested in houseplants.
- **Pothos** – One of NASA's top 10 air purifying plants. Marble leaf can be white or yellow. Fast growing vine.
- **Sansevieria** – Commonly called the **Snake Plant or Mother-in-law's Tongue**. Another NASA top 10 air purifying plant. Can withstand almost total neglect and tolerates being pot bound. Many different varieties.
- **Dwarf Schefflera** - Regularly check under the leaves for Red Spider mites. Let soil dry out completely before watering. Easy to manage the size by clipping the top leaves.
- **Spathiphyllum** - Difficult to pronounce but easy to love. Commonly called the **Peace Lily**. One of NASA's top 10 air purifying plants. High light location indoors helps to produce the white flowers which remain attractive for several weeks.

Plants don't commit **PLANTICIDE**. If a plant up and dies, it's probably because of one of the following pests:

- **Mealy Bugs** - Very common houseplant pest. Mealy bugs have a white, waxy, covering in which they lay the eggs. Important to wipe off the plant and remove as much of the white substance as possible. Take plant **outside** for any cleansing/insecticide usage. Isolate the plant. If the infestation is advanced, thoroughly wash the plant and use a commercial insecticide (**Read the Label Carefully**) or UF/IFAS treatment: 1 gallon of water to 3 tablespoons of liquid cooking oil and 3 tablespoons of dish washing detergent (not a degreaser).

- Red Spider Mites - Reproduce every three to five days under dry, warm conditions. They hate moisture and humidity, so give them a shower or hose the plant down outside. Difficult to detect (silver leaves, red dust, leaves drop). Use a magnifying glass to check the underside of the leaves. Use a commercial insecticide (**Read the Label Carefully**) or UF/IFAS treatment (see above). If you see the webbing, it's too late to save the plant.
- Homo sapiens – What can we say?? Pesticides, insecticides, etc., etc., etc.
- The pests we love: cats, dogs, birds, and others. Be careful mixing pets, children and plants. Poisonous hassle free houseplants include: Hoya, Philodendron, Pothos and Schefflera.

Pest prevention can be relatively easy. Check your plants weekly (at a minimum). Give your plants a thorough washing every few weeks in the sink or tub. Purchase some **Green Cross Insurance** (ha ha). Top two are good preventive tips for catching bugs early on.

Final words of wisdom: Find a hassle-free houseplant species that works for you – buy all its relatives! Now, get growing! A green thumb is simply a positive state of mind.

For more information on environmental horticulture, Contact the Hillsborough Extension Service at (813) 744-5519, visit our office at 5339 County Road 579, Seffner, FL 33584 or check out the County and University websites: Hillsborough County Extension at <http://hillsborough.extension.ufl.edu> or University of Florida/ IFAS at <http://solutionsforyourlife.com>