

# gardening

## Houseplants require TLC

By Pat Leuchtman  
leisure Columnist

My first houseplant was a philodendron and it reigned in solitary splendor on my dining room table. The dining room was cool and dark with north and east exposures, but the philodendron flourished. I was fortunate that in my ignorance I had chosen a plant that didn't need a lot of light and could stand the cold.

I didn't aspire to anything more exotic than philodendron until I

blooming plants like geraniums and begonias will do well in that same window; they require a lot of sunlight.

Some plants are content with a medium light. Rubber trees, fancy-leaved caladiums, ferns and dracena are some of the plants that will do well in east or west windows.



The following information is provided by the Franklin County Extension Service:

### Now is the time to:

- Save money by making your own wreath.
- Check condition of stored fruits and vegetables.
- Spread wood ashes on your garden except where potatoes are to be grown.
- Check houseplants for insect damage.

### Note:

- Browning leaf tips on houseplants can be caused by: improper watering, exposure to cold drafts, excess fertilizer and insect attack.
- Be sure to ventilate if you use pesticides on plants indoors.

moved to Greenfield and took up gardening with a vengeance. Then I was busy outdoors during the season, of course, but I also had a large living room with south and west exposures. I set to filling it up with plants and acquired a rubber tree, spider plants, asparagus ferns, angel wing begonias and a forest of avocado trees.

The main thing I have learned about growing houseplants is that no matter what your situation, you can surround yourself with healthy greenery if you take your limitations into consideration before you choose your plants. You can have a lovely jungle of grape ivy, piggy-back plant, wandering jew and the ubiquitous philodendron even if you have nothing but north windows. But don't think that cactus or

Once you have the proper plant in the proper window, your next major consideration is how much to water it. Each plant has different requirements. Cactus should be watered only when the soil is very dry, perhaps only twice a month. It is also a good idea to water cactus and succulents only on sunny days and with tepid water. (Actually, you shouldn't water any plant with cold water from the tap, but cactus is especially susceptible to this kind of shock).

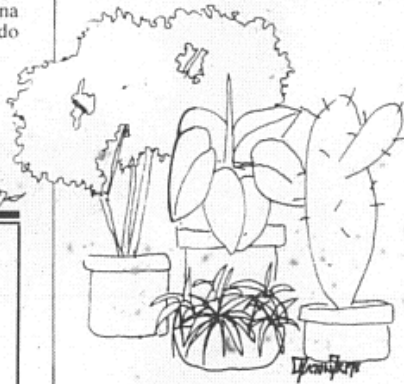
At the other extreme is the spathiphyllum. This is a lovely dark green plant with arching leaves that sends up waxy white blooms similar to a calla lily. It requires frequent watering and will start to wilt when the soil just begins to dry out. A thorough watering will revive it quickly,

but experience with your own plant will tell you when it is time to water, without waiting for a telltale droop. Aside from being particular about its watering, the spathiphyllum will thrive with little care. It doesn't need sunlight and will tolerate temperatures as low as 55 degrees.

The kind of pot you use also affects the amount of watering you have to do. A clay pot allows water to evaporate quickly so it is ideal for succulents and cactus. Plastic pots retain water to a much greater degree so they are recommended for spathiphyllum, camellias and asparagus fern.

You can grow any plant in either clay or plastic; just remember you will have to water them differently.

Many florists now attach little cards to the houseplants that they



sell which will tell you the plant's basic requirements for light and water. If you know what a plant needs and can provide it, you should have good "luck" with your plants. It is because of providing the wrong conditions for a plant that people fail and think a green thumb is a mystical gift bestowed at birth on a lucky few.

Florists will be happy to help you by suggesting appropriate plants to use in different situations. Make use of their knowledge.

Like plants in the garden, houseplants have to be fertilized and they must also be repotted from time to time so that the roots don't become crowded. I will discuss these chores next week.

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