

# House plants and their containers

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Faithful houseplants may appreciate spa-like attention in the winter months. Large leafed plants like monstera philodendron or the sword like Dracenas need dusting and shining to improve appearance and the ability to photosynthesize. I like to plan a morning of "TLC" to freshen up both large floor "trees" and smaller houseplants as well.

Simply and gently moving a clean paper towel over leaves supported by the hand underneath can remove dust and grime. Leaf "shine" products tend to clog pores of the plant and

use unnecessary chemicals.

It's also a great time to look for any unwanted "pests". Make sure there is no evidence of aphids, spider mites or mealy bugs. A cotton swab soaked in rubbing alcohol and applied can deter mealy bugs. A good misting of water can deter spider mite activity, if seen.

I hold off using water-soluble fertilizer in the winter months as that is stressful for most houseplants in winter. One exception for me is the orchid cactus which I start fertilizing in late February due to its early bloom time of beautiful red blossoms in March.

Cleaning water tray res-

idue underneath plants is a good idea. Also, check them for cracks and breakage. They are inexpensive and easy to replace. They offer important protection for your floor surfaces. The exterior of glazed decorative pots can be wiped clean of any splashed dirt.

With terracotta clay pots and their porous nature- the care is different. They are susceptible to mineral deposits and stubborn stains. The build-ups can affect plant health and detract from the appeal of pots. There is an Eco-friendly solution using baking soda shared below.

Cleaning Clay pots with Baking Soda

Prepare a paste with 4 Tablespoons of baking soda with 2 Tablespoons of water. That is applied to wet clay pots on the inside and out. Let them sit for an hour - 1 ½ hours. Then wash the pot under running water with a sponge. Soap should not be used and avoid scrubbing. In a sink- pour slightly cooled boiling water over the pots 2 times and give a final rinse. Pat the pots dry with a towel and allow them to dry completely before storing.

With small houseplants that like extra humidity (pilea, fittonia, etc) I make pebble trays for them in the winter. They sit on a bed of wet pebbles and evaporation increases humidity as the heating system nearby is so drying. Our Norfolk island pine trees get some

sized trays as well.

Watering plants is a once a week errand for me. In winter I do a slower watering and pay attention to the amount of heat being called for as well as how much sunlight we've had. Those are indicators of what plants "need" in terms of water in a given week.

I take note of plants needing transplanting as they are outgrowing pots. I keep track and will wait until spring to do that as it is less stressful for them.

I remove lower dead leaves when seen. Yellow lower leaves generally mean I did not offer enough water the week before and can make adjustments for the next watering.

Having houseplants around can be such a pleasure especially in the darker winter months.

Our extension service has detailed information and resources on houseplant care at the following link:

<https://extension.unh.edu/agriculture-gardens/yard-garden/houseplants>

The care of flowering houseplant fact sheet is also very helpful.

<https://extension.unh.edu/resource/care-flowering-gift-plants-home-fact-sheet>

Littleton Garden Club is actively engaged in the community and welcomes new members from around the area. To learn more visit the Web site at <https://www>.