

THE PRINCIPLES OF GROWING PLANTS INDOOR

*K. Wijeyathungam, Dept. of Crop Science,
Faculty of Agriculture,
University of Peradeniya.*

Indoor plants not only adorn formal displays of hotels, banks, and offices but odd little plants nurtured tenderly on filing cabinets, on window sills, on bathroom shelves and in doctors waiting rooms add colour and aesthetic value to the surroundings. They are a kind of living furniture, a decoration that helps to make a room more comfortable, more friendly and less formally rigid.

Houseplants or indoor plants differ from outdoor plants only in terms of their location. They were not originally developed to grow indoor - rather many were derived from ancestors native to the shade of tropical forests. House-plants are wild plants that were domesticated.

Basic consideration for creating the indoor landscape.

1. What is the environment in the room in which you want to grow plants; how does it meet the cultural requirements of your houseplants.
2. What are the structural confines in the rooms you want to decorate with plants - Survey a room's overall dimensions, the locations of windows, the placement of heating and cooling ducts, the furniture arrangement, traffic patterns, wasted or empty spaces colour and design scheme. Note where plants will fit comfortably in the rooms design to improve its appearance.
3. What is the scale and shape of the plant in relation to the scale of the room?
4. Will each plant or group of plants create a focal point within a room? Displayed in a decorative hanging basket, the arching leaves and shoots of a large spider plant will attract more attention than if displayed in a dull corner the far end of the room

5. Will the plant blend well with other plants in the room?
6. Does the leaf shape and plant form complement the decor of the room, Certain plants look better with the particular design fetures of a room. Almost all plants look best with an undercorated wall for a background.
7. Will the colour of the plant blend with, add to or compete with the colour of the room?
8. How will the supports and containers blend with the other furnitures?
9. How will lighting enhance the appearance of a plant in a particular setting?

Light:

You should consider both the amount of light available and the length of time it is present in your home. The intensity and duration of light vary considerably not only from one room to another but also within a room. Light is less intense at a window with shade or curtains, another window may permit more intense light to enter, but for a shorter time . Light at a single window will vary in intensity and duration if trees or other obstructions outside block the sun's rays at certain times of the day. Furniture and reflective surfaces within a room can alter as well.

Too little light causes a plant to elongate and loose leaves that it can no longer support due to diminished photosynthesis. As the plants attempt to gather more light, the spaces of the internodes lengthen and the leaves grow broad and thin. Too much of light causes plant to wilt and their vibrant green colour to fade. Leaning plants should be rotated.

Light Categories:

Full sun: describes locations that receive as much light as possible. These can be found within 2 feet of a south facing window. This means at least 5 hours of direct sun. Very few plants survive.

Some direct sun - Areas that are brightly lit but receives less than 5 hours of direct sun during the day. Windows facing east or west and 2 feet from window locations. These are ideal for many flowering plants and some foliage plants.

Bright indirect light - Receives as much as light as possible without any direct sun, within 5 feet of a window that receives direct sun for part of the day only. Most foliage plants like this situation.

Partial shade - Receive indirect sunlight at varying intensity within 5-8 feet from a window for part of the day only. Few flowering plants but a fair number of foliage plants adopt to this lighting.

Shade - Poorly lit areas. Only a few plants will tolerate this condition.

Plants suited for different light categories.

Full sun - Agave spp, Cactus, Opuntia, Geranium, Miniature roses, and hydrangea.

Some direct sun - Asparagus fern, Begonias, Coleus, Cyclamen, Episcia, Gardenia, Kalanchoe, Sword fern, and Gloxinia.

Bright indirect sunlight - Bird's nest fern, Button fern, Orchids, Crotons, Diffenbachia, African violets, Spider plant, Caladium, Dracena, Ficus

Partial shade - Pothos (Devil's ivy), Philodendrons.

Plants for shade - Chinese evergreen (Aglaonema), Cast iron plant

Temperature:

Temperature interacts with light, humidity and air circulation. Most plant adapt to the temperatures normally found in our homes, around 70° F (day) and 65° F (night)

Humidity:

All plants prefer 50% Humidity. A cool vapour humidifier is one way to increase humidity. Easiest way for humidifying the air is to set pots in trays or saucers filled with pebbles. Plants can be grouped together to prevent more water loss.

