

Most entries are scales from 1 to 5: the more symbols are filled in, the more of it the plant needs. For light, the strong symbol shows the ideal spot, the pale ones what the plant can still put up with. All entries are rules of thumb – your plant itself shows you best whether it's doing well.

CARE



very easy

Forgives mistakes and forgotten watering – perfect for getting started.



easy

Does fine with normal care, as long as the spot is right.



moderate

Quickly shows watering and placement mistakes – a little attention pays off.



demanding

Needs just the right conditions, such as lots of light or high humidity.



for experts

Usually only thrives long-term with experience or equipment like a grow light or a glass cabinet.

If you're just getting started, pick your first housemates from the easy levels.

LIGHT



shade

A few steps from a window without direct sun, 1–3 m from a window with morning or evening sun, or 4–6 m from a window with midday sun.



partial shade

Right at a window without direct sun, just under 1 m beside a window with morning or evening sun, or 1–3 m from a window with midday sun.



bright, no midday sun

A bright spot without direct sun – say behind a sheer curtain at a window with morning or evening sun, or 1–2 m from a window with midday sun.



bright with some sun

Right at a window with morning or evening sun, or up to 1.5 m from a window with midday sun.



full sun

Right at a window with midday sun, as much sun as possible.

Light can be one of the most limiting factors for houseplants¹: just a few steps from the window, only a tenth of the light may arrive². The distances are rules of thumb¹; in summer, sensitive plants can get sunburn behind glass³.

WATER



very little

Only water once the soil has dried out completely – roughly every 2–4 weeks in summer, less often in winter.



little

Water when the soil is dry a finger deep – roughly every 1–2 weeks in summer.



moderate

Water when the top 2–3 cm are dry – roughly once a week in summer.



plenty

Water as soon as the surface starts to dry – often several times a week in summer.



always moist

The soil must never dry out, but mustn't stand in water either – check often.

The times are rough guidelines – never water by the calendar, check first³. If soil sticks to your finger pushed in up to the second knuckle, there's still enough water²; then water thoroughly and tip away what's left in the saucer³.

HUMIDITY



dry air is fine

Copes well even with dry, heated air in winter.



low

Normal room air is enough – just don't put it right above a radiator.



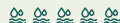
medium

In winter, grateful for neighbouring plants or a tray of damp gravel.



high

Needs help – a gravel tray, a group of plants, a steamy bathroom or a humidifier.



very high

Only thrives long-term in a glass cabinet, a terrarium or with a humidifier.

Heated rooms often have only 10 to 30 percent humidity, while many tropical plants are used to 70 to 90 percent². A gravel tray, a group of plants, a steamy bathroom or a humidifier help; misting can help if you do it often^{3,2}.

HEIGHT



small (up to 30 cm)
Fits on any windowsill or shelf.



medium-low (30–60 cm)
For a windowsill, shelf or sideboard.



medium (60 cm–1 m)
Best on the floor or on a stool.



tall (1–2 m)
A floor plant – needs room upwards and to the sides.



very tall (over 2 m)
Grows up to the ceiling over time unless you cut it back.

The typical size indoors after a few years; for hanging plants, the shoot length. After it come the width and the growth habit – “est.” means no source gives a width and we derived it.

GROWTH



very slow
Barely changes over the years – rarely needs repotting, almost never pruning.



slow
Grows at a leisurely pace, new leaves tend to come one at a time.



medium
Grows visibly during the season without getting out of hand.



fast
Puts on a lot during the growing season – repot more often, prune now and then.



very fast
Grows at a racing pace in good light – pruning and a support are part of the care.

How fast a plant puts on size in good conditions – and so how often you'll need to repot or prune. The levels are rough classifications, not measurements.



TEMPERATURE

"ideal" is the comfort range; below the minimum temperature the plant can be damaged – watch out at cold windows and in cold draughts in winter.

Most houseplants are happy at normal room temperature². Take care in winter: no touching the windowpane when it's freezing outside, no cold draughts, no nights behind a drawn curtain^{2,3}.



SOIL



houseplant soil (peat-free)

Loose, lightly pre-fertilised all-round soil for most foliage plants. Ideally peat-free.



cactus and succulent soil

Very free-draining, with lots of sand, grit, pumice or lava rock. Holds little water and dries quickly – for cacti and succulents. To mix your own: houseplant soil with a third sand or grit.



standard potting compost

A gardener's standard compost with some clay. Heavier and more stable than ordinary houseplant soil, holds water and nutrients well – for large, top-heavy plants.



mineral substrate (e.g. expanded clay, pumice)

No humus at all, e.g. expanded clay, pumice or lava rock. Doesn't rot and hardly compacts; nutrients come only from the fertiliser.



orchid substrate

Coarse pieces of bark, very airy. For plants that grow on trees in the wild.

Soil holds water and nutrients and still has to let air reach the roots. Plants that need extra drainage get grit or sharp sand (horticultural, not builders' sand) mixed in³; ideally buy peat-free soil⁴.

FEEDING

How often to feed during the growing season – liquid fertiliser in the watering can, never onto dry soil.

Feed from roughly spring to autumn, most easily with liquid fertiliser in the watering can – in winter at most once a month, and never onto dry soil³. White crusts or brown leaf tips point to too much: then flush the soil thoroughly².

REPOTTING

A rough rhythm – the roots and the pot show whether it's really time.

The years are only a rough rhythm: a crowded mass of roots, or soil that dries out very quickly while the plant hardly grows, show it's time^{2,3}. Best in spring, into a pot only 2–10 cm wider, depending on the source^{2,3}.

POT

Pot diameter for a young plant or cutting → for the full-grown plant. “est.” means the value is derived with a rule of thumb.

A drainage hole is a must³. In clay the soil dries faster than in plastic or glazed ceramic²; “est.” means the size is derived with a rule of thumb.

TOXICITY



non-toxic

Listed as non-toxic by the sources – it still doesn't make a good snack.



mildly toxic

Chewing or swallowing can irritate the mouth, stomach and gut. Touching is harmless, eating isn't.



toxic

Even small amounts can cause clear symptoms. Keep it out of reach of children and pets.



highly toxic

Serious poisoning is possible. Not for homes with small children or pets that nibble.



Sap irritates the skin

The sap can irritate the skin – wear gloves when cutting and dividing.

The vast majority of plant poisoning cases cause mild symptoms or none at all; children are affected most often⁵. Every fact sheet lists humans, cats and dogs separately.

If something has happened

Remove plant remains from the mouth; as a first step you can give one or two glasses of water or tea to drink – no milk, no salt water, don't induce vomiting. Call your local poison control centre or see a doctor, and take the plant with you⁵. Unconsciousness or severe breathing difficulties: call your local emergency number⁶. Cats and dogs: call the vet straight away, and take the plant (or a photo of it) along⁷.

MY POISON CONTROL CENTRE

MY VET

SOURCES

- 1 University of Illinois Extension: Houseplants: Lighting. <https://extension.illinois.edu/houseplants/lighting> (accessed 11 October 2026)
- 2 DelPrince, J. M. & Perry, J. H. (2021): Care & Selection of Indoor Plants. Mississippi State University Extension, Publication 1012. <https://extension.msstate.edu/publications/care-selection-indoor-plants> (accessed 11 October 2026)
- 3 Royal Horticultural Society: How to grow houseplants. RHS Growing Guide. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/types/houseplants/growing-guide> (accessed 11 October 2026)
- 4 Royal Horticultural Society: Peat-free information for gardeners. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/peat-for-gardeners> (accessed 20 October 2026)
- 5 Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung (BfR): Giftpflanzen: Wie kann man sich schützen und was ist bei einer Vergiftung zu tun? Fragen und Antworten. <https://www.bfr.bund.de/fragen-und-antworten/thema/giftpflanzen-wie-kann-man-sich-schuetzen-und-was-ist-bei-einer-vergiftung-zu-tun/> (accessed 11 October 2026)
- 6 National Health Service (NHS) (2025): Poisoning. NHS website, Health A to Z. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/poisoning/> (accessed 21 October 2026)
- 7 PDSA (People's Dispensary for Sick Animals) (2020): First aid for poisons and toxins. PDSA Pet Health Hub. <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/pet-help-and-advice/pet-health-hub/other-veterinary-advice/first-aid-for-poisons-and-toxins> (accessed 21 October 2026)