

## ***Proven Techniques for Proper Maintenance of Indoor Plants Through the Winter***

One of the more challenging times of the year to maintain indoor plants is during the winter months. With low moisture and light levels as well as shorter days and the furnace running, plant lovers' hands are tied. However, with just a little foresight and planning, managing becomes a lot less stressful and a lot more manageable. Although there are some plants that do well outdoors and indoors, others provide a true test of our abilities to care for them during the winter months. The following are some tips to help you manage your plants throughout the tough winter months:

### **Watering**

All plants need water. However, during the winter months, they may require less. Check your plants on a regular basis and make certain to water on a schedule. When plants are dry, the soil is lighter. Try using a chopstick or pencil to penetrate the soil before watering. If the stick has soil on it, the plant is just fine; otherwise, water the plant. The exception to this rule is ferns and potted citrus – both require a lot more water even during winter.

### **Fertilizing**

Houseplants need food in order to perform. This is especially true when they are actively growing. However, during the winter months, plants grow a lot more slowly and don't really need the same amount of nutrients that are required during spring and summer. So, avoid over fertilizing your plants until early spring or once you take them back outdoors. In our zone, that's generally around April. If you decide to fertilize, do it carefully and dilute the solution by 50% or more.

### **Repotting**

Most often, we consider repotting plants with a spring, summer or even a late fall activity. However, consider repotting during the winter months for plants that may have experienced damage over the summer or just may have outgrown their current space. Consider it an opportunity to spruce up the plant and provide a more spacious and decorative environment.

### **Vacation**

If your plants are home alone frequently and you're unable to maintain a regular watering regime, consider low-care plants (e.g. Chinese Evergreen, ZZ Plant, Snake plants, Ponytail Palms or Pothos). These varieties can withstand a much longer watering scarcity and keep on ticking, especially in low-light environments.

### **Dusting and Cleaning**

The indoor environment is a lot like the outdoors in terms of how dust and particles can land on the leaves. To keep your plants looking healthy and alive, wipe the broadleaf plants with a damp cloth and consider using milk on the leaves of Pothos and other large leaf plants. Spray your ferns every single day because they are very temperamental and love lots of moisture on their leaves.

Although winter may be considered the easiest time of the year to kill a houseplant, with the right conditions and some tender loving care, you can ensure that your houseplants survive some of the most grueling and stressful times of their life. Provide them with the same level of care and attention they deserve during the outdoor growing season and they'll perform just as well indoors.