

Indoor Plant Bulletin No.14

8 Common Indoor Plant Care Myths

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Over the years a number of ideas have come to be accepted as part of the conventional wisdom of plant care. Some of these ideas started with nursery growers who developed their plant care techniques based on the optimal conditions that they can create in their greenhouses and nurseries. However, some of these practices are inappropriate for houseplant owners growing plants in more trying circumstances. No wonder so many people believe they just don't have green thumbs.

Myth #1: Plants grow bigger in bigger pots.

Fact: The fastest growing plants are those that are moderately potbound such that their roots fill most of the pot. Frequently repotted plants put much of their energy into growing more roots, at the expense of leaves and flowers. Plants in large pots are also much more likely to suffer from root rot. See *Indoor Plant Bulletin No.18* for more information on repotting your plants.

Myth#2: Ailing plants will benefit from plant food.

Fact: Plant food or fertilizer is not medicine. It is intended for healthy plants that are growing vigorously and are using up the essential nutrients in the soil. You cannot force plants to use more nutrients than they need. Excess nutrients accumulate in the soil and burn tender roots and cause leaf discoloration. Ailing plants absorb fewer nutrients than healthy plants. See *Indoor Plant Bulletin No.8* for more information on fertilizing plants.

Myth #3: Indoor plants need lots of direct sunlight.

Fact: Only some indoor plants benefit from direct sun. Many common indoor plants are shade-lovers that suffer from "sunburn" (bleached out leaves)

when exposed to the direct rays of the sun. See *Indoor Plant Bulletin No.3* for more information on light for indoor plants.

Myth #4: Yellow leaves and brown tips mean over watering.

Fact: These common symptoms have many possible causes including too little water, inadequate light, excess fertilizer, fluoridated water, hard water, and poor soil quality. See *Indoor Plant Bulletin No.26* for more information on diagnosing plant symptoms

Myth #5: Misting plants will increase the humidity.

Fact: Misting plants once or twice per day increases the humidity by so little that it has no practical value for humidity-loving plants. Misting does help keep plants clean, however.

Myth #6: Most indoor plants need high humidity to thrive.

Fact: Most of the commonly available indoor plants are commonly available because they have proven their ability to adapt to very dry environments found indoors in winter. Although most indoor plants, succulents excepted, come from naturally humid habitats, many can survive quite well in low humidity, as long as they receive adequate moisture through their roots.

Myth #7: Chemical pesticides are the only effective way to eliminate plant pests.

Fact: There are many safe and effective treatments for plant pests. These treatments include products such as dish soap, rubbing alcohol, horticultural oils, silicon, sand, sticky traps, diatomaceous earth, and hot pepper. See *Indoor Plant Bulletin No.7* for more information on treating plant pests.

Myth #8: Most indoor plants go dormant in the winter.

Fact: Most indoor plants come from tropical regions that are warm year-round. Unlike temperate zone plants, tropical plants grow actively all year long. In northern climates, the winter months bring fewer hours of daylight. This reduction in light will cause plant growth rates to slow, leading some observers to believe they are dormant.

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If you have a specific question about the care of your plants, you can contact me directly at wcreed@horticulturalhelp.com

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