

# ***THE ART OF INDOOR PLANTS***

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## **LAS VEGAS STYLE**

*A Guidebook by Kristina Pearson*





# THE ART OF INDOOR PLANTS

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## CHAPTER 1 - PLANT CARE INTRODUCTION

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Growing indoor plants in any region is an art. A simple art. It is not about having a green thumb. It is about the desire to nurture a living plant. People can experience peace and harmony with living plants in a household. There are eastern cultures that have specific ideas of the aura of plants. If this is not your vibe, there are a wide variety of beautiful artificial trees and plants that you can place in your home for a similar look. You will not get the feeling of a living plant; you will mirror that image.

There are distinct types of plant growers. People grow plants to propagate and sell. People grow plants to obtain the plant's full maturity and size. As a hobby or YouTube content. People grow plants in conservatory style rooms to enjoy. These people commit time, energy, and money to produce lush and healthy plants. This type of growing is on the side of commercial growers. The people who are the main characters in this book are typical home dwellers. People who enjoy a single living plant or 30 in their household. People who enjoy growing plants as a hobby.

Here you will find helpful information and tips about growing plants, specifically in Las Vegas or the southern Nevada desert region. Our climate is arid with humidity levels below the natural level of exotic plants. Those exotic plants grow in the tropical rain forests and jungles. They grow outdoors in all seasons to enormous sizes with exotic leaves and flowers. Commercial growers propagate and sell the same plants as indoor juvenile size plants. Growers who hope to experience the full maturity of these tropical plants use equipment and lighting to duplicate the natural environment of exotic tropical plants. Homeowners grow plants to enjoy in their infant or juvenile stage of smaller leaves, trunks, and stems. These tropical plants adapt to our indoor environments and thrive with bright light, feeding, and care.

Soil and light are the primary factors to successful plant growth. Plants enjoy a moist and very airy soil with ample light. When I say light, I do not mean direct sunlight. I mean bright filtered light. Think of it as a view of the sky. The plants grow upright in search of a view of the sky, not a view of the direct sun. When you keep the right soil condition and moisture, the root system will thrive. It is the root system that nourishes the plant's trunk, stems, leaves and flowers. It is the sun's light that allows the leaves to photosynthesize and convert oxygen into nitrogen. If a plant is lacking sufficient clean leaves, it will suffer. If a plant has soggy roots it will suffocate. It is that simple. Your plant has a balance between the root ball below the soil and the leaf structure above the soil. In winter, the leaf structure has less light and does not require the same feeding as it does in spring, fall and summer. The root system requires less water and fertilizer since it is not powering a growing leaf structure. It is in a resting mode. Plants are simple to understand.

Growers knot plants by genesis, a Latin name and sub types. They have DNA that will find their genesis. Since we are not scientists, we know them by their familiar or market name. We group them by cacti, succulents, palms and dracaena, ferns, philodendrons, pothos and so forth. Most people just say house plants and group them all together. The groups help us decide their light and water needs.

When the plant label says it can "tolerate" low light. It means it will do just that. It will sit there and do nothing in low light. The plant would rather be in a condition where it will thrive and produce new growth. A light meter can show how much natural light an area has. Most homes have a reading below 500. Most plants would like a reading of 1,000 which requires a grow-light. Near a bright window, plants can thrive, produce growth, and look healthy. That light is around 500 – 700 without a grow-light. To sustain plants, less light means less water. Simple rule.

Ferns, snake plants, and ZZ plants are known for their "low light" feature. They still need to be near a naturally lit window. They will not survive in a room with no natural light. When you place one of these plants in a brightly lit room, you can see the beauty it can achieve. Since not all our rooms are brightly lit, we need to discover a way to create the same environment. You can use grow-lights to enhance the lighting. The grow-lights on the market today have improved since the old days of weird blue lights. There are grow-light bulbs that you can put in any light fixture. The bulbs look like a regular light bulb yet produce a full spectrum of light for your plants. You can replace recessed lighting (can lights), light strips, hanging



pendant style lights, pole lights and table lights. There are light bulbs for every size and style. You can choose a soft light or other tone. The actual grow-light fixtures come in a variety of styles, sizes, and shapes. It is an endless list of choices for any style room. You can find them at big box stores, nurseries and online.

The sun changes its position throughout the seasons. It is low in the winter and high in the summer. A north facing window will be the lightest in the summer while a south facing window will be the lightest in the winter. East and west facing windows have either morning or afternoon light and the position will change from low to high through the seasons. You can move your plants around the house during a change of seasons to maximize the light. Spring and fall are the easiest seasons since they are in between the highest and lowest levels of sun. Summer has longer hours of light while winter has shorter hours of light. Watch which windows provide a maximum level of light during certain months and plan accordingly.

Along with season lighting changes, plants also recognize temperature and humidity changes. Plants may be dormant during the winter months. It is a natural cycle. Tropical plants do not recognize seasons in their natural habitat, but they have adapted to indoor home environments. Let them be dormant. Growth will be slow or not visible during winter. The plant may drop some leaves. The plants will require less water and no fertilizer to survive their sleep. It's a season of rest. Let it be and keep it trimmed of falling or yellowing leaves. When spring arrives, the plant begins its growing season with a need for fertilizer and water.

Most tropical plants can be grown in a hydro environment. You may wonder how this can be since over watering is the number one killer of plants. It all comes down to suffocation. When a plant is placed in a hydro environment, it typically has about 1/3 water and the medium is tiny rocks, perlite, or aqua medium. Since there is no dirt, there is no suffocation with the water. You do need to replenish the water on a regular basis to ensure there is oxygen. The benefit is the lack of pests. Some growers use a hydro method to reduce the risk of spider mites, mealy bugs, and fungus gnats in an environment with many plants. Home growers use the hydro method as a hobby interest. This method does require a special hydro fertilizer.

The labels on plants that describe the temperature ranges, watering and light requirements are general. The grower has no idea where the plant will be living. In Las Vegas, we can interpret the labels to meet our arid environment. Full sun does not mean the Las Vegas sun or any region's sun for that matter. It means full sky. Plants are damaged by the sun. They want light, which means the sky. This goes for cactus and succulents as well. The cacti you see in the desert is not the same quality as you want for your home or garden. Cacti will thrive with well-draining soil, fertilizer, protection from the sun and water. When you apply these elements, you will see a beautiful specimen. The desert gardens in Las Vegas are far more beautiful than the desert scrub brush, the same variety of plants tolerate in the desert. The temperature ranges fit most homes. We air condition in summer and heat in winter to a moderate range. The same is true for any region. The biggest difference is the amount of daylight hours. The shorter the daylight house, the less water a plant will need; an easy recipe to follow.

Proper watering is an easy talent to master. The best tool is a water meter. They are under \$20. The probe goes deep into the plant's pot and displays water zones from wet to dry. These are better than the finger method. They are more exact and have a narrow-pointed probe to gently press into the soil without damaging roots. If you have a weekly watering method, use the water meter before you begin to water. Not all plants will last 7 days, and not all plants will need watering in 7 days. You can adjust the amount of water for the plants that can go longer than 7 days. It is hard to adjust the plants that do not last 7 days. Use a water meter and you will get to know each of your plant's water needs. Smaller plants and freshly re-potted plants need water more often. The amount of water makes the difference. I know which of my plants would rather feed from a reservoir. I place these pots in a container of water for about 30 minutes. They absorb what they need. I pick them up, let the excess water drain off and return them to their decorative pot. Some plants like to be watered until water comes out the bottom. After the water comes out the bottom, I still place them in a container of water for 10 minutes to ensure all the soil has been hydrated and repeat the draining and returning to their decorative pots. I never pour water into a plant in its decorative container unless it is a large tree or giant plant. Always measure your water for this type of system. You will discover the exact amount of water for each season. If there is water in the saucer, use an old towel or something to remove the excess water. Excess water will drown the roots and attract pests.



Aquaphobic and compacted soils will retard water. You can water the soil, and the water runs off and does not become absorbed into the soil. The symptoms of this are leaves that are wilted and drooping. Before you try to water, gently pull the plant from its pot if you can. Place the bare root ball in a bowl of water to hydrate. When you pull the plant out of its pot the soil may feel compacted and hard. You can gently tickle the hard ball to separate the soil. Do this over a dry bowl to keep the dirt. Be gentle with the roots. You can loosen the dirt around the root ball. Place the plant in a bowl of water to hydrate. Then you can place the plant back into its pot with the same dirt. It may need perlite added to keep it loose. Once you put the plant back into its pot with the soil, you can water the whole pot, drain off any excess and place it into its decorative pot. Aquaphobic soil becomes dry from lack of water over an extended period. Once you pull the plant from the container and soak it, the soil will again be soft and hydrated. You can then place the plant back into its pot and return it to its decorative container. If you cannot remove the plant from the pot. You can place the pot in a basin of water for about an hour or so, until the soil begins to hydrate. Then you can add water to the top to help draw the water upward.

Plants are a part of your décor. They need to be healthy and vibrant. Plant placement makes a positive difference in your mood and adds interest to a room. Light, soil, and water are the three elements that affect plant health and growth. You don't need more plants; you need quality plants. Plants that add interest, are thriving and add beauty. Purchase small plants that you can nurture from the beginning. They are easier to shape through pruning from an early age. You can learn better from a young plant into maturity. A plant collection is a joy. When it becomes a chore, reduce the number of plants to a manageable number.

I am not covering Orchids. I don't grow Orchids and cannot claim to be a very good source. They require specific soil conditions, watering and environmental elements. They are gorgeous to display; I am not the one to care for them.

I do have ornamental trees and plants that have grown tall. I nurtured these from small plants. I do prune them into a Bonsai style. In fact, I do the same for some of the basic shrubs in my garden. Good pruning and shaping of basic shrubs create a dramatic style and allows the plant to flourish without so many leaves to feed. I do cover outdoor plants in another book.

Make your plant care a hobby rather than work or duty. Take an interest in your plants. Make your plants a part of the design and décor of the room. Keep your plants simple. Own as few plants as you can honestly manage. Your collection should be easy care and not gobble up precious time. Plant time is your Zen zone.



## CHAPTER 2 – PRUNING AND PROPAGATING

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Pruning, cropping, trimming, chopping, cutting are all the same. Pruning reduces the size of a stem to shape or reduces the size of the plant. Typically, cutting a stem just above a leaf cluster or node will encourage the plant to produce another stem. This will shorten the length of the stem just cut and create a new stem. It creates lushness in bushy plants. The same method is used to reduce the length of a leggy stem such as climbing or trailing plants. The plant will produce another stem of new growth that is not as leggy. Pruning is also a method used to shape a plant. Certain branches are removed to create a certain shape. Bonsai gardeners will cut certain branches to thin out a plant. Then they will use Bonsai wire to shape a branch. They will do this again over a period of years to create the shape they want. Pruning will aid the plant to grow a thicker trunk or main stem and more delicate outer branches. All plants require pruning at a point.

The part of the stem you cut from the main plant can be propagated. You can cut a 6” stem, remove the bottom leaves and place it in water to grow roots. Once rooted, you can plant it as a separate plant or plant it back in the mother plant if you are growing a lush style plant. It is important that you have at least 2-3 leaves in tact for photosynthesis. You can place the stems in wet soil to root. There are other methods of propagating trees that are a bit more complicated and typically for outdoor trees. To propagate stems in water, it is important that only the bare stem is in the water, if you have leaves in the water they will rot. The same is true if you are propagating the stems in wet soil. Certain plants like to dry the stems a bit to develop a stub for protection. You can pat a little cinnamon (from Viet Nam or Sri Lanka for quality) on the ends of the stems before placing in dirt or water. This will encourage root growth and protect stems from bacteria. There are also root dust products on the market that do the same thing. The natural method is highly effective.

You can propagate more than one stem. Depending upon the type of plant. You may prune more than one branch or stem. Once you have propagated multiple stems into plants, you can create a larger, more lush plant by adding them back into the mother plant pot. You can use the new plants as gifts. The propagated plants will be the same age as the mother plant, so your new plants are not the micro mini plants you often find in the store. Chopping a Monstera is done to reduce the height of the mother plant. Typically, the newly propagated plants become the primary plant, and the mother is used for propagating. You can add the new plants into the mother plant’s pot if you want multiple plants. This method is typically used when the mother plant has lost the bottom leaves leaving the base bare. Trailing or crawling plants work well for propagating. It keeps the main plant healthy and lush.

Rosemary is an easy plant to propagate. Cut a 6” stem length. Gently remove the lower 2” of leaves as you avoid damaging the bare stem. Dust the stems with rooting material or cinnamon. Place tiny aquarium rocks in a glass jar, set the stems into the rocks, and add water. Add water every few days as needed. Ensure that no leaves are under water, so it does not rot. In a couple of months, you will have several rosemary plants as gifts or add to your garden. This same method works well with geraniums. Propagate in spring or summer for the best growth before planting. Planting outdoors is best done in early fall. You can winter your new plants indoors over winter as needed. In Las Vegas, our winters are not too harsh. Just the same, your baby plants will need protection.



## CHAPTER 3 – UPRIGHT, CLIMBERS, CRAWLERS AND TRAILERS

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Plants will either stand upright like a tree, climb up a pole, crawl along a flat surface or trail down. You can train your plant to stand upright by pruning. A climbing plant has air roots that cling to a surface to climb up. A crawling plant will spread along a flat surface. Some climbing plants are used as crawlers such as Monstera. Plants that trail are usually hanging or on high shelves. These plants can also climb on trellises, lines and over objects. I bet you have seen a pothos or philodendron that is a single stem clinging to surfaces all around a room. You can enhance the beauty of these plants by pruning and providing support. A Monstera is a natural climber. In the tropics, it will cling to trees to reach the top of the canopy to see the sky. In our homes, this is not the best way to show off its beauty. You can create a sturdy surface for it to climb. As it grows, you can chop to keep it at a specific height. You can add the propagated part back into the pot to create multiple stalks. Keeping a Monstera pruned will provide a beautiful specimen. If you allow it to sprawl out and climb anyplace, it will not be as interesting or beautiful.

If you choose a moss pole for your Monstera, you are committed to propagating. The plant is dependent upon that moss pole rather than the pot for water and nutrition. It requires extension of the moss pole and constant attention keeping the moss inside the moss pole hydrated. You use another medium for it to climb. There is a company that makes a beautiful carved wooden post. It is expensive and the plant will cover the wood carvings. You can make your own. At the hardware store or the art department at Walmart, start with 8 ½” dowels and very thin wire such as picture wire. The dowels are about 2’ or 3’ tall or so. Wire the dowels together. Once secured together, they will form around the inside of your pot. The Monstera will climb up that at a slower speed than a moss pole. You can keep it pruned to that size or extend the dowels. If you have access to the same size bamboo poles, the process is the same. Avoid painting the poles since the plant will attach to them. If your plant seems top heavy. Find a deeper and heavier decorative pot for security.

The same pruning method goes for any trailing plant. You can cut, propagate, and add the new plant back in for multiple stems. You can have a long trailer and others that are different lengths. Avoid the same sprawling stringy stem to crawl everywhere. There is nothing attractive about a sprawling stringy stem lacking leaves. A string of pearls, a string of turtles or hearts is a beautiful plant when pruned. Cut the length of the long stems, propagate and add them to the pot. It will become like a full head of hair. These are the most beautiful when in a large medium-shallow planter on a pedestal with stems all around. When you cut and propagate, use the stems with the closest leaf positions. These plants do like humidity. If you have a humidifier, they will produce more attractive closely fitted leaves. When you see a string of pearls in a terrarium environment, you won’t recognize it as the same plant.

The plant will produce the best leaves where the light is bright. When you have a hanging or crawling plant, be aware of the lighting. Low light will produce stringy, small leaves. You want a consistent size in your leaves. Pruning is the answer to this. You can still have a wondering plant around the room that is attractive with the right light.

If you have a long trailing stem with beautiful leaves, you can wrap them around the pot area to create a lush plant. The best way to conduct this is to gather the stems before they get exceedingly long, training them to go around on the parameter.

Check out images of plants online to see how you want to display your crawlers, climbers, and uprights. There are endless sources of people who style plants that will amaze you.



## CHAPTER 4 – SOILS, SOIL MEDIUMS AND NATURAL FERTILIZERS

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Soil, light and water. Without these elements your plants cannot survive. There are several types of soil for different types of plants. You can create a general planting medium for your indoor plants. When you have a specific need, you can mix in a specific medium for a particular plant. The bags of indoor planting soil like Miracle Grow, are a breeding ground for pests. They come in an airtight moist bag – you get the picture. Plus, they have commercial fertilizers in the soil. If you can find an indoor mix that has no fertilizer, that is the best. However, the Miracle Grow type is simply fine for the plants we have indoors.

I do not order special mixes or drive all over town for designer soils. I use common indoor plant soil for my base. I add to that about 20% perlite, 10% orchid soil, and 10% cactus/succulent soil. This mixture is a light combination of soil with aerating perlite, bark bits of orchid soil with a tiny bit of sandy cactus mix. I add a couple of tablespoons of worm castings to the pot I am filling. I sprinkle cinnamon into the mix to reduce the life of any pests. If I suspect the soil has pests, I spray a mix of 2 tablespoons of hydrogen peroxide with 2 liters of water. I put that in a spray bottle and spray and stir the soil in the bucket, not enough to dampen the soil. It has served me well and I don't see compacted soil. I use a Lowe's 5-gallon blue bucket to mix it in with a lid that is not airtight. I keep leftover soil in their original bags by rolling down the tops rather than clipping or making them airtight. I keep my soil in the garage.

If you have a cactus, succulent, or orchid, you can use its specific soil without mixing. I do add more perlite to the mix to keep it light and moisture wicking. The perlite helps to keep the soil from keeping too much water.

I use Leca, which is a clay material in the form of little balls for the bottom of my pot rather than stones. There are other types of clay pebbles that work well. I place about ½ inch on the bottom of indoor pots which protects any roots from becoming waterlogged. You can mix Leca into the soil as well to support hydration.

I use a variety of top dressing for styling indoor plants. Coconut fibers, moss, coconut husk silk, clay pebbles, sand, horticultural charcoal and horticultural calcined clay soil, crushed granite, and others. Small decorative stones and marbles can be added for interest. You can find ideas in the aquarium department at places like PetSmart and aquarium shops.

Natural fertilizers come from the kitchen. You have a variety of different natural fertilizers already. Hang on to coffee grounds, eggshells, banana peels, citrus peels, rice rinsing/soaking water, dry bean soaking water, any water in which you have soaked vegetables. Keep it in an empty water bottle for watering day. Keep the banana peels and citrus peels in zip lock bags in the freezer. A day ahead of watering, chop up a banana peel, place it in a liter of tap water and wait 24 hours. The next day, spider out the banana peels, add another liter of water and you have a very gentle and welcomed fertilizer for any plant. Do the same for citrus peels. Citrus is best for plants that enjoy acid soil. I use this outdoors. The coffee grounds can be lightly spread in planters. I do this about once a year in my indoor plants, and the rest is spread throughout my garden plants. Crush the eggshells, if you are not using them right away, you can freeze them or microwave them for a minute on high. This will destroy bacteria.

1 teaspoon of cinnamon, 2 tablespoons of rice, 1 liter of hot water. Stir and sit 4 – 6 hours. Strain and add another liter of water. Gentle fertilizer for all plants.

Sprinkle a small amount (1/8 to ¼ teaspoon) of dry cinnamon in the dirt of pots. This aids in root development, feeds and disinfects. It kills mold, fungus and gnats.

2 teaspoons of yellow split peas, ¼ cup water, blitz, sit 6 – 12 hours, strain, add to 1 liter of water. This is especially good to help a Christmas cactus bloom.



## CHAPTER 5 – PEST CONTROL

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Pests that feed and live on plants are tiny. Aphids love roses and annoy all gardeners. Indoors we have fungus gnats, spider mites, mealy bugs and aphids. They arrive from the nursery on plants you just bought and the soil that comes in airtight bags for the most part. If you have an infestation, it is a miserable experience. Removing the source of pests is easy and the best defense.

At the store or nursery where you are buying plants, give them a close inspection.

1. Lift the plant from the pot and check the roots, The roots should be white and healthy without any smell or signs of rot. The soil should not be soggy. Often it is watering day, and it is wet.
2. Inspect the plant at the base. Check the soil for any signs of webbing, mold, or unnatural things. Continue up the stem and leaves. Check both sides of the leaves for signs of damage, pests, discoloration, deformity of leaves, webbing, white specks, or anything moving. Wear your glasses or bring a magnifier if your eyesight is in need, these pests are micro tiny.
3. Look around at the other plants for similar symptoms. The area should be pest free, with a clean smell without standing water, plants crammed together or dodgy leaves around.

When you bring the plant home, give it a wash and keep it quarantined for a few days. Inspect it daily. When you are confident it is pest free, add it to your collection. Your collection should be pest-free. It also needs checking on watering day.

Keep your potting soil with some air flow. Open the airtight bags to breath. The soil will dry out and that is what you want. The moist soil is an invitation to pests.

When you see or suspect pests, isolate the plant from the others and treat it. This is easy and you have the natural ingredients at home.

**BRING IN THE BIG GUNS.** For an infestation of spider mites especially, and other pests:

2 quarts of water

¼ cup peppermint castile soap (Dr. Woods)

¼ cup tea tree castile soap (Dr. Woods)

¼ cup eucalyptus castile soap (Dr. Woods)

1 Tablespoon hydrogen peroxide (Dr. Woods)

1 cup 70% alcohol

Mix and fill a spray bottle. Outside, generously spray your plant from top to bottom, under the leaves and on the top of the soil. Let that set for an hour or so. Rinse the plant off. Keep the plant isolated and watch for any more pests. Repeat in a few days if necessary. If you cannot find the soap for each of the oils, you can add about 10 drops of essential oil into ¼ cup of any flavor castile soap. If you can only find one of the 3, use that and ensure you have ¾ cup total soap. Reduce the recipe for smaller amounts as needed.

Diffuse essential oils like peppermint, cinnamon bark, wild orange, tea tree and cassia to repel bugs. 20 drops of cedarwood, eucalyptus or arborvitae in a spray bottle is an excellent product to dust wood surfaces, leather type couches and spray near your plants. It is better is a spray than to diffuse because the oil is so thick. Spray a leather type couch to keep the material subtle, clean and repel flying insects. The aroma is divine.



## CHAPTER 6 – IDENTIFY “HELP ME” SYMPTOMS

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When your plant is suffering, it will show different symptoms. It would help if they could speak. As you become a seasoned plant owner, you can feel their pain and see the smallest of changes. Plants can go through a bad patch, recover and you never know what happened. Plants can go into dormancy that looks like they are dying. There are some signs that can help you diagnose the problem. Light, soil and water are the primary causes of plant stress.

**Yellowing leaves.** Leaves that get old can turn yellow. It is part of the aging process. These leaves will be a single leaf at the bottom part of the plant. This is normal. The plant should be pushing out new growth that replaces the ones it is discarding. If you don't see any new production, and the plant has more yellow leaves than green, it is a problem. Typically, the ratio of light to water is the culprit. Leaves that do not get sufficient light are exposed to the same amount of water as the top that is getting ample light. Re positioning the plant to better lighting, turning the plant around or raising the plant closer to the sky can help. Plants with foliage that keep the bottom shaded will yellow and lose leaves. A grow-light shining up can help. The other side of the ratio is too much water. Typically, you will see yellowing throughout the plant rather than just the bottom leaves. Pull the plant from the pot and check the roots. Look for dark soggy roots. You can trim rotting roots and re-pot the plant into airy soil that is not soggy. Give the plant plenty of bright light to recover. It is the ratio of light to water. Use a water meter to support adequate soil hydration.

**Dry crispy leaves and edges.** This is often underwatering for extended periods. Use a water meter to keep the soil at the right hydration. Some plants do not like to dry out. If your plant is one that likes a light moist soil, a water meter can accurately display the hydration in the soil. Your plant may have compacted or hydrophobic soil. Pull the plant out of the pot and feel the root ball. If it is hard, tickle and gently loosen the root ball. Place it in water to hydrate. If your soil is hydrophobic, do the same. Pull the plant out of the pot. You can place the bare root ball in a bowl of water to rehydrate. Check the root ball to ensure it is not compacted. Boston ferns are famous for losing bottom leaves. This is a light issue.

If your soil is not the issue. Check for pests. A pest infestation will cause damage to the leaves. The pests may no longer be present, but the damage has been done. Remove the damaged leaves or trim the edges if that is possible.

Another cause of dry crispy leaves is sun exposure. If your plant has direct sun exposure, the leaves will burn, crisp up and turn brown. This is especially true with variegated leaves. The light part of the leaf does not photosynthesize and is easily damaged by bright, hot or direct sunlight.

If your plant has not been re-potted in a while, pull it out and check for a root bound ball. If it is not root bound, it may just need a fresh re-potting.

**Limp dropping leaves.** This is typically a water issue. Pull the plant out of its pot and check for soggy roots, rotting roots, compacted soil, hydrophobic soil or just too dry. Adjust the hydration level in the soil. Protect the plant from pests and direct sunlight while it recovers. If you have just fertilized or changed fertilizers, it may be over-fertilized. If you suspect this, pull the plant from the pot and soak in fresh water or flood the pot to flush out excess chemicals.

**Plants that do nothing.** Certain plants will go for extended periods without producing any growth or new leaves. Dormancy is usually the issue. Dormancy is a normal cycle, and the plant should wake up in 6-8 weeks or months. If a plant has not produced any new growth in years, it is not thriving. Pull the plant from the pot and check the root ball and soil. Plants need adequate light, water, and soil to thrive. If any of these three elements are missing, it will choose dormancy. Start with light.



## CHAPTER 7 – STYLING PLANTS

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Plant lovers enjoy the beauty and vitality of their collection. Plant collections have moved beyond a bunch of plants on a shelf or crowded together on the floor. Plant styling has become a popular hobby with everyday plant owners. What exactly is plant styling?

Plant styling is the placement, pruning, shaping, and grouping of household plants. It starts with a type of plant and how you want to display the plant. Will you place it on a table, group it with other plants, grow it into a certain shape? Think of it like putting together an outfit to wear, a new hair style or room design.

Start with a decorative planter. After deciding if you are growing a tall or bushy plant, consider the shape and size of the decorative planter. Planters can be a texture, shape, color, or size. The decorative planter can define the style of the plant or tree. You can change out the planters anytime to change the mood. When a plant needs a bigger home, you can stay with the same design or change it altogether. If you redesign your room, your planters can change to create interest.

Plant stands; shelves, tables and other supports offer design enhancements. Most planters have a more interesting appeal when elevated of the floor or flat surface. The felt protectors help your furniture from damp planters. Creating different heights with lifters offers a plant grouping both light requirements and appeal.

Shop around your house for plant styling material. Unused items stored in the garage, a box of donations, dishes and ceramics at the back of a cabinet can offer ideas. An old fondu pot is a good choice to lift a plant, offer a container to sit in and add interest. Turning other pots upside down for a base. Using a stack of books to lift plants to different heights. Using old serving bowls and dishes make decorative saucers. Go through your house to find the treasures you need to style your plants.

Top dressing is especially appealing in plants. Moss, alive or dried is an interesting medium. Sand, tiny aquarium rocks, black charcoal, crushed granite, and marbles add interest. Mix and match the different mediums. You can easily change them if you change the decorative pot.

Terrariums, aquariums, and humid cabinets can display exotic plants. IKEA has a wide selection of diverse types. A shelving unit with lighting creates a dramatic display. Bookshelves with plants is a classic. There are small lights that you can add to a bookshelf if the light is not sufficient. Pendant lights can highlight a particular plant.

Group a variety of feathery, spikey, bushy, tall, short, and fat plants together. This is fun when you have a variety of small plants that may seem lost on their own. Lighting will add designer effects.

Prune to shape into Bonsai style plants. You do not need to Bonsai a plant to help it appear in a Japanese style. You can use Bonsai wire to help train regular plant branches into interesting shapes. It takes 3-6 months to create, and the wires are not very visible while training. Turning a tall leafless stem into a twisted or S shape is dramatic and does not harm the plant.

Use your imagination, check out the internet for inspiration. You will not be satisfied with the nursery pot and saucer again.

Whatever your design, plan for lighting. Up or back lighting helps low lying foliage and creates drama. Hanging lights can highlight plants. Grow-lights offer the full spectrum of lighting that plants need. Grow-lights come in a wide variety of styles and natural colors. Say goodbye to weird blue or green lighting. Grow-light bulbs fit any light without changing the natural color of lights. Check it out. Lighting is so much fun, and your plants will thrive.