Obstructions and Distance

A south window which faces a building 10 feet away is **not** a high-light window! But some obstructions can be useful: A south window with some trees might not be the place to grow cacti, but it could be perfect for ferns.

What if you love peace lilies, but only have hot south or west windows? Not to worry! Light intensity decreases with distance from the window, so you can grow these several feet away.

But keep this in-mind when dealing with low-light windows. Sunlight decreases exponentially with distance, so even just six inches from the window will make a difference to your plant.

Also remember: light travels in a straight line, so ***beside*** a window is not the same as ***in*** a window!

The Indoor Sun Shoppe

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Symptoms of Light Problems

When a plant gets **too little light**, it "reaches" for the light, growing long, thin (and flimsy) stems between leaves. In nature, this could help it outrace competing plants, or get up through another plant that had fallen onto it.

But in a dim window, it's a never-ending story. You'll end up with spindly, sickly plants, or cacti that grow thin and floppy. Eventually they'll die - either from light starvation, or because you chuck them!

Solution: Choose the right plant for your available light. Or, if you only have north windows and love cacti, it's time to invest in grow lights.

If a plant is getting **too much light**, the leaves may appear pale and washed-out instead of rich green. In extreme cases, the leaves may actually burn, leading to brown or yellow spots. If you see spots *only* on the sun-facing side of a plant, sunburn is the culprit.

Solution: Move the plant to a different window, or slowly move it away from the window, one foot at a time.

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The Right Light for your Houseplant

All plants need light; it's the vital factor in keeping your plants alive and healthy. So when choosing plants, it's important to consider the light requirements of the plants you want to grow, as well as how much light your different windows receive.

We want you to be successful, so if you aren't sure about a plant's light requirements, just ask! There are no "dumb questions!"

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Which Window?

Not all windows are created equal. Windows receive different amounts of light depending on the direction they face. Here's what you need to know about ***unobstructed*** windows:

South windows get light almost all day. This is the place for high-light plants like cacti and succulents.

East windows have bright morning light but no hot afternoon sun. Great for medium light plants, like ferns and calatheas.

West windows get intense afternoon light but for fewer hours; it might not be enough for the extreme sun-lovers. Set high-light plants close to the window, and low-light plants farther away.

North windows are the place for low-light plants, as they provide very little direct light (even in high summer). Plants will have to be close to the glass.

Plants in Native Habitats

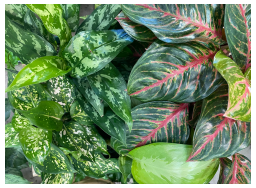
There is no single sure-fire way to look at a plant and know how much light it requires, but there are some good guidelines based on the way they grow in nature. First, some typically ***high-light*** plants:

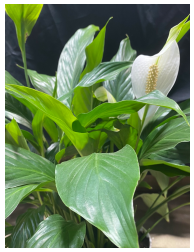
Cacti and succulents: With thick leaves or stems, waxy surfaces and other features, cacti and succulents are adapted to survive in hot, sunny environments. A shaded cactus is a sad (and eventually dead) cactus!

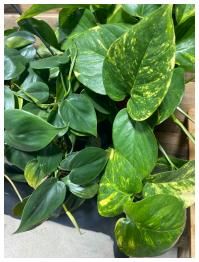
Trees with woody trunks: Trees use their trunks to get their heads above the competition and grab unobstructed light.

Epiphytes: Location is everything! Growing on trees or rocks is how air plants compete for light. Many vines climb up from the dark forest floor to get their heads into the sun.

Next come ***medium-light*** plants. This broad group includes plants that grow on the margins of forests, on the ground under sparse cover, or on the shaded sides of hills and cliffs. Many of these plants, like Dieffenbachias, Aglaonemas, Calatheas and Marantas have broad, vividly-colored leaves. Most ferns also like bright but diffuse light.







Finally there are ***low-light*** plants. Vining plants are able to survive low light until they reach the top of the canopy, while some plants grow in dense forests. These plants tend to have broad, dark green leaves, which allow them to use the limited light available. Good examples are Peace Lily, Pothos, vining Philodendrons, and dark green broad-leaved Dracaenas.