

DOS AND DON'TS

DO

- Mist frequently. Morning is the best time, since it gives them a chance to dry off completely.
- Give lots of light.
- Check their leaves to make sure they're hydrated.

DON'T

- Let them sit wet for long periods of time, especially in cold weather.
- Let water sit in the cusps of the leaves. In our cool climate, this is a recipe for rot.
- Let them dry out excessively. If they get a little too dry, soak them; but better to do it through a series of short soakings, rather than letting them sit under water for hours. Shake them off well afterwards.

What about feeding?

In nature, air plants get their nutrients from the dust that settles on their leaves while they're moist. You don't need to fertilize, but an orchid fertilizer mixed at 1/10 strength, used once or twice a month during the summer, can help them grow more quickly.

My air plant flowered, but now it's dying!

Air plants flower once; then, the entire stem dies off. If it's happy, it will either branch, or grow "pups" at the base of the plant.

These pups eventually form a clump, which will all come into bloom at once. A large blooming clump is an impressive sight! You can also separate the pups when they're large enough, and grow them separately.



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Air Plants (Tillandsias)



Tillandsias are not your traditional houseplant. While the rest of your collection requires pottery and soil, your air plants (with the right amount of light and water) can live almost anywhere.

An epiphyte and a member of the bromeliad family, tillandsias aren't as challenging as you may think - they just require a little special attention!

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Where are they from?

Air plants grow over a huge area—in the subtropical United States, in Mexico, in Central America, and even as far south as South America. There you can see them growing on bare rocks, on the sides of trees, on the ends of branches, and even on houses and telephone lines.



One very familiar air plant is the rather non-typical Spanish Moss, which covers trees in the coastal Deep South.

But growing on trees, cliffs and rocks presents a problem—how to get water if there’s no soil?

Air plants have evolved an ingenious solution: They get it directly through their leaves. Most of them do this through the specially-adapted white scales on their leaves, which give them their grayish, dusty look.



Air plants that don’t have this dusty appearance come from humid areas and need a little extra help to stay happy!

What do they need?

Lots of light and water! The first requirement for any green plant is sunshine; air plants find their place in the light, away from the shade of competing plants, by living in extreme environments. Their roots serve mainly to hold them in place, not to absorb nutrients.

Because of this, an unobstructed, south-facing window is best. West is second best. An east window may work, depending on the situation. If you have only a north window, don’t worry—an affordable grow light can help you with even the most demanding of plants.

To water air plants: the stiffer, grayish, “dusty” varieties come from places with dry days and nightly fog (think San Francisco); that fog is all the water they need. You can mimic this effect by spraying your air plant a few times a week. You can also dunk them in the faucet and shake them off afterwards.

The greener species, often with softer leaves, need more frequent watering. You can also soak them, but for no more than half an hour. In either case, *consistency* is best. Watch the leaves—if you see them rolling up like a straw, your air plant needs water!

Where should they go?

All an air plant needs is good light and water. As long as you meet these requirements, you can display them any way you like! You can hang it in a glass globe. You can mount it on a piece of driftwood or a nicely-shaped branch. There are even specially-made holders for them if you want to go state-of-the-art! The possibilities are endless.

