

#### 4. How often do I water?

This is the single most common question about houseplants, and for good reason; we'd love to be able to say "once a week" or "once every three days," but plants' water needs change throughout the year. The real answer is: when they need it. So when do they need it?

Overwatering happens when we water *too frequently*, not when we give too much water at a particular time. The goal is to *get water to all the roots* (by thorough drenching) and to *make sure they get air* (by waiting between waterings).

For **smaller pots**, push your finger into the soil. If it's dry just below the surface, it's time to water; if not, wait a day or two and check again.

With **large pots**, a dry surface doesn't guarantee that it's not still wet farther down. Dig deep with your fingers, or push a bamboo chopstick down into the soil like a dipstick, to check the moisture level.

#### 5. How much do I water?

For most **green leafy plants**, drench the soil until water comes out the bottom, then let it dry 1/2 way down before watering again.

**Cactus and succulents** are a little different. Most of them want a thorough drenching, but let them go bone-dry before watering again. During winter they can stay dry for longer; prolonged, wet, cold soil is a death sentence!

**Air plants** can either be sprayed down, or soaked for half-an-hour at least once weekly. But don't let water linger in the crevices!

Everyone loses some plants. When we master one group, we move onto a new group, kill them for a while—and on goes the cycle. Learn from your mistakes, don't give up, and never go plastic!



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# “I have a black thumb!”

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Are you a houseplant murderer? Do rubber trees give you flashbacks? Have you killed so many plants that you feel a twinge of guilt every time you see a fern? Are plastic plants looking a little more attractive these days?

Some lucky people grow up surrounded by well cared-for plants, but nobody is born with a “green thumb.” Likewise, nobody really has a “black thumb” either. Talking to your plants might not help much.

However, learning to listen and understand their needs will boost both your confidence and your chances of success.

