

Recognizing and Correcting Light Problems

By Amy Cash-Allison

Excessive Light

- The general appearance of the plant will be weak. The color will be very pale, and there will be little or no gloss to the foliage, especially on older leaves. I have also seen the opposite effect where the leaves darken nearly to a black color, and cultivars that are supposed to have silver backs turn red.
- The outer leaves may also become blotched with yellow markings or areas, and they die off much more quickly than normal.
- The crown becomes tight and crowded. Occasionally, the plant will begin to grow upright, but growth is tight instead of open.
- The leaves will be brittle, hard, and often curl or wrap down around the rim of the pot.
- The stems of the leaves will usually be short and thick and will sometimes start to bend.
- Oftentimes, the plant will lean away from the light source.
- The plant will bloom, and flowers are intensely colored, but short-lived. The peduncles will have trouble clearing the thick growth of foliage.
- Rust or bronze-colored “burn” or scorched blotches may appear on the leaves. Sometimes holes may develop due to burns.
- The plant may sucker more than normal. Overall growth of the plant may be stunted or slow.
- Sometimes fantasied cultivars will revert to solid colors, or you may also notice more mutations among your plants.
- Over time, especially after correcting the problem, the leaves may develop a crackled appearance, almost like stained glass.
- Variegated varieties will revert to solid green.

If you are using artificial light, start by repotting your plants and reducing or stopping fertilizer use until you have the issue resolved. Then to correct try to reduce the amount of time the lights are on each day. Try an hour or two less the first two weeks and use your plants' reaction as a guide. It will take some time for the foliage to relax. Also, you might try raising the lights higher above the plants. If growing in natural light, try moving your plant further away from the window, move it to another location, or place more shading material in between the window and the plants.

Light Deficiency

- Leaves will spread out and general growth very open so that the soil is easily seen.
- The leaf stems will be unusually long and may bend and twist to expose the leaf surface to the most available light source.
- The leaves will not overlap, but will fan up and out
- The plant will begin to toward the light source. The leaves will reach upwards, instead of laying down flat.
- The plant will fail to bloom
- The overall appearance of the plant will be poor or weak, and the lower leaves may die off at a higher rate than normal.

If you use artificial light, reduce the amount of space between your plants and bulbs or leave the lights on for a longer amount of time each day. Increase day length only one hour per week. You may also need to change your bulbs if they are old, but change only one at a time in each fixture to avoid shocking the plants from overexposure.

If you grow in a window, experiment with different windows in your house, preferably east or south. Notice what kind of light the plants are getting at all times of day.