

HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET

CORNELL

Cooperative Extension
Nassau County



Nassau County
Horticulture Program
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Houseplant Troubles



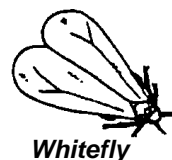
Mid-winter is the time when most house plants are usually at their worst. Subdued winter lighting and the lack of humidity render many plants long, leggy and unthrifty. The concerned homeowner frequently adds excessive amounts of water and fertilizer or repots the plant into a larger pot, hoping that one or all of these will help the plant out of the winter humdrums.

In most cases the plants need to be brought closer to a natural light source and to have the surrounding humidity increased. The latter can be accomplished by placing the plants on a tray of pebbles. Place some water in the tray but not enough to cover the pebbles; you don't want the plants to take up water from the pebble tray. When the water in the tray evaporates, it will create some humidity. Keep water in the tray.

It isn't always easy to determine what's causing a plant to decline. Insect problems are the easiest to diagnose because most are visible with the naked eye or with a magnifying lens. Disease problems are very rare on house plants in the average home because houses are very dry during the winter and fungi and bacteria require lots of moisture to spread and multiply. What's left are cultural problems that account for about 85% of the reasons why plants decline or die.

Learn to be your own plant diagnostician by using the chart on the reverse side. Match symptoms to the possible causes. In most cases there are a few possible causes - which means you have to do some detective work. Did you overwater the plant or not water it enough? Was the plant in the direct path of a cold or hot draft or did every member of your family decide to fertilize it? These are just a few of the possibilities.

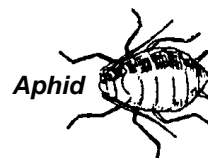
Good luck!



Whitefly



Mealybug



Aphid



Spider mite

A-1-20 DWM:cms reviewed RT 1/03

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SYMPTOMS

Many common houseplant problems occur with faulty culture. However, similar symptoms can result from different causes.

POSSIBLE CAUSES:

Excess light, i. e. exposure to direct sun can be too intense for many plants

Insufficient light impairs photosynthesis and flowering

High temperature, especially at night, reduces growth and vigor, detrimental for flowering

Low temperature, especially continued exposure, is adverse to growth of plants

Overwatering or poor drainage reduces soil aeration; roots die or water and nutrients are not absorbed

Lack of water is a most limiting factor of growth

Low humidity adversely affects the overall health and vigor of most plants

Too much fertilizer becomes toxic and injures plant roots

Lack of fertilizer causes a deficiency of nutrients required for plant growth

Compacted soil reduces root growth and activity

Drafts cause rapid water loss from the foliage and flowers

Daylength controls flowering of some plants (photoperiodism)

Air pollution including an excess of manufactured or natural gas from faulty appliances

FOLIAGE

tips or margins brown	
bends down, curls	
yellowish	
oldest drops	
all drops	
spots	
wilts	

X	X
X	X
X	X
X	X
X	X
X	X
X	X

GROWTH

long, weak, thin, soft	
new leaves small	
none develops	
plant dies	
stunted	

X	
X	X
X	
	X
X	X
X	X
X	X

FLOWERS

fails to develop - bud drops	
color less intense	
declines too fast	
becomes smaller	
no blooms	

X	X
X	X
X	
X	
X	X
X	
X	

X X Cases when low leaves first turn yellow and fall. Injury usually progresses up the stem.

X With short internodes on the stem.

XX With long stem internodes on the stem.