

Houseplants are a wonderful addition to your home. Besides their decorative beauty, they can significantly contribute to cleaner air in your home and tide you over until spring comes again to our Midwest gardens. There are several things to consider when selecting houseplants, and when re-introducing plants kept outside for the warmer months back indoors.

Most houseplants can handle the transition from indoors to outdoors and back, and many will benefit from it. More exotic species such as African Violets and Orchids may do best in one happy spot indoors. Don't bother bringing in plants that are more yellow than green, or are truly infested with insects: their problems will only get worse.

- Bring plants in by the time it is regularly 40° at night. Begin the transition a week or two earlier. Try to have the move complete by the time you turn on the heat inside for a more gradual transition.
- It's best to repot in the spring, when plants are actively growing unless the plant is severely root-bound.

Your first step is to clean up: thoroughly soak the soil to wash out minerals, salts, and insects. Scrub the outside and bottom of the pot as well to eliminate bugs, dirt, and fungus. Remove tired foliage and weeds that may have started in the soil.

Next, begin acclimating to less light. In almost all cases, your best light indoors is not nearly as bright and intense as much shadier areas outdoors. Think of this as the reverse of getting ready for a cruise, when you might go to a tanning salon in advance to avoid a bad burn on your vacation. Allow them to spend 1-2 weeks in increasing shade to adjust. Reverse this treatment when moving back outdoors. Even with this treatment, expect to lose a few leaves when they move inside.

Apply bug repellents and/or insecticides. [Garden Safe Fungicide 3-In-1](#) (a natural neem oil product), [Bonide Insecticidal Soap](#), or [Schultz Houseplant & Garden Insect Killer](#) are all good choices. In addition to one of these sprays, use [Bonide Systemic Granules](#) in the soil, beginning at least a week before the move indoors to eliminate and prevent insect problems.

Finally, reduce watering once inside and fertilize at half-strength monthly.

Houseplants For Cleaner Air:

[Studies by NASA](#) have shown that when plants take in air, they absorb carbon dioxide. Oxygen and pure water are released back into the air. Other substances including pollutants can be translocated to the roots where the plants use them, metabolize them, or release them into the soil. Two to three houseplants are enough to contribute to air quality in the average size living room.

Plants that are especially helpful and are successful in a home environment include:

[Areca Palm](#)

[Boston Fern](#)

[Cast Iron Plant \(Aspidistra\)](#)

Chrysanthemum

[Chinese Evergreen \(Aglaonema\)](#)

[Corn Plant \(Dracena 'Massangeana'\)](#)

[Croton](#)

Dendrobium Orchid

[Dieffenbachia](#)

[Dracena](#)

[English Ivy](#)

[Grape Ivy](#)

[Parlor Palm](#)

[Peace Lily \(Spathiphyllum\)](#)

[Philodendron](#)

[Pothos](#)

[Rubber Plant](#)

[Schefflera](#)

[Snake Plant](#)

[Spider Plant](#)

[Weeping Fig Tree \(Ficus\)](#)

What's Bugging Your Houseplants



Aphids: pear-shaped sucking insects, mainly on new growth



Spider Mites: oval and flat, usually rust or red colored; sucking on bottom of leaves leaving stippling and tiny webs



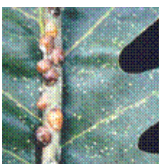
Cyclamen Mites: common on African violets, nearly invisible tiny oval and transparent



Thrips: very small flying insects, appear as moving black or brown "powder" when tapped onto paper



Whiteflies: attaching to the undersides of leaves when young, tiny flies are easily disturbed into a flying cloud



Scale: sucking insects that appear as shiny brown and gray bumps



Mealybugs: appear as tiny dusty cotton balls around plant joints; can lead to black mold

Solutions:

We are all trying to limit our use of toxic chemicals, indoors and out. With diligence, these methods can control many problems. Sometimes, more "persuasive" methods are called for to prevent the spread of harmful insects and disease, and allow us to return to more natural maintenance techniques.

A mild solution of soap and water or Bonide Insecticidal Soap sprayed on plants with a small infestation of aphids or spider mites can often rein in the problem. Heavier cases require products such as natural neem oil (Garden Safe Fungicide 3-in-1) or Schultz Houseplant and Garden Insect Killer.

Thrips, whitefly, and mealybug can also be controlled with the Schultz spray, or with Bonide Whitefly and Mealybug Spray. Scale insects can also be controlled with these products, and all would be best controlled with one of these sprays and a systemic (inside out) granule in the soil, such as Bonide Houseplant Systemic Granules.

Bringing Houseplants Indoors



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