



## Winter Care for Your House Plants

By: Bonnie Turnbull, UCCE Master Gardener of Lake Tahoe

We do love our houseplants--and yes, they are taking care of you, too.

The most important thing to know is that most houseplants settle down for "a long winter's nap" from November to March. Many of our houseplants originated in tropical rainforests--areas of high humidity. The best thing you can do is match that environment.

So, as you guessed, they do like your heater. Most thrive at temperatures between 65 and 75 degrees during the day, between 60 and 65 at night. That's probably not so different from your house.

But what these plants are most craving is light, and missing that, active growth slows or stops.

If you are like me, you crave "plant time" in January. Maybe you are tempted to water them more often, or give them a little extra love/fertilizer.

Don't.

It's too much for their sleepy state. To treat them the best, give them as much sunshine as you can. Group them in your sunniest windows but not against the cold glass. Plants grown at lower temperatures will need less light.

However, humidity is your constant challenge. Many houseplants prefer a humidity level of about 45%. Unfortunately, the relative humidity in many winter homes is about 15%. Place plants away from heating vents and cold drafts. Forget misting which has only a temporary impact. Instead, group your plants so soil moisture and leaves humidify the air. To boost humidity further, place the houseplants on shallow plates filled with pebbles and water.

But, ironically, water the plants less!

Without active life processes going on, less water is lost through the foliage. Cooler temperatures also reduce the amount of evaporation from leaves. *How much water? You ask.*

For most houseplants, allow soil to dry to ½ inch or more below the surface. Your regular schedule should change. However, if you don't water enough, those spider plants may tell you by developing brown leaf tips.

Do not fertilize.

The plants are resting, growth, if any, is very slow. Also, tender new growth may invite insect infestations.

If you want to spend quality time with your plants, shine them up with a cleaning.

Dust and grease accumulate on the leaves and may slow growth. Cleaning the leaves can improve overall plant health and help control insects. Sponge off the leaves with a very mild solution of dishwashing soap and tepid water.

Or, to share real quality time with your plants--bring them in the shower with you!