



Columbia Nursery

Winter Houseplant Care Guide

Helpful Tips from Columbia Nursery

Winter can be a challenging time for houseplants in Northwest Montana. Shorter days mean less light, indoor heating creates drier air, and common pests may move indoors to take advantage of cozy conditions. Follow this guide to help your plants stay healthy and thrive through the winter months.

Why Are My Leaves Turning Yellow?

In younger plants (under 2 years): Yellow leaves or limp foliage often signal overwatering. Many houseplants go semi-dormant in winter and don't need as much water as they do in summer. Check soil moisture by sticking your finger into the soil up to the first knuckle. Only water if it feels dry at that depth.

Clip off yellow leaves—they won't turn green again—and let the plant dry out slightly to see if the problem improves.

In older plants: Yellowing leaves may also indicate an iron deficiency, often caused by depleted soil. This could mean it's time to refresh the potting mix or repot the plant. If you haven't been fertilizing your houseplants, start now, but reduce the fertilizer strength by half during winter since plants grow more slowly.

Why Are My Leaves Turning Brown and Dry?

In younger plants: Dry, brown leaves may actually be a sign of low humidity, even if the soil is adequately watered. Plants with fine leaves are especially prone to this. Create a humid microclimate by placing your plant on a pebble tray filled with water—the evaporation will raise local humidity. Keep the tray filled throughout the winter.

In older plants: Brown leaves can indicate that the plant is root bound. Look for early signs like dried leaf tips. If you notice this, it may be time to repot into a larger container. Regularly grooming your plants by removing brown leaves encourages healthy new growth once conditions improve.

Cleaning Dusty Plants

Household dust can clog the tiny pores (stomata) on plant leaves, making it harder for plants to breathe. Wipe large leaves gently with a damp, soft cloth. For plants with small leaves, give them a gentle rinse in the sink or shower. There's no need for fancy cleaning solutions—plain water works perfectly. Remember to clean both the top and underside of each leaf.

Managing Pests

Check your plants regularly for pests:

- White fuzz = Mealybugs: Remove with a cotton swab dipped in rubbing alcohol.
- Brown bumps = Scale insects: Prune affected leaves or stems.



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- Webbing or tiny red dots = Spider mites: Rinse the plant with cold water to remove them.

The sooner you catch these pests, the easier they are to manage. Columbia Nursery carries safe treatment options for larger infestations.

How to Care for Houseplants While You're Away

For trips less than 3 days: Water and mist your plants before leaving.

For trips of 3–7 days:

- Group plants that like low light in a bathtub or laundry sink.
- Tuck crumpled, wet newspaper between the pots to create a humid environment.
- Add a small amount of water to the bottom of the tub or sink.
- For plants needing more light, use a plastic storage bin to create a similar setup near a bright (but not direct sun) location.

For trips of 7–21 days:

- Use the same method, but ask someone to replenish the water weekly.
- Don't leave plants crowded together for longer than 3 weeks—they need space for healthy air circulation.

Visit Columbia Nursery

Columbia Nursery carries a wide variety of houseplants year-round, along with pots, soils, and all the supplies you need. Our team is happy to help you keep your houseplants healthy and vibrant through every season!