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Growing and Caring for House Plants

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GROWING AND CARING FOR HOUSE PLANTS

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Department of Horticulture and Forestry
South Dakota State College
Brookings, South Dakota

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GROWING AND CARING FOR HOUSE PLANTS*

S. A. McCrory

African Violet

Mealybugs

Oval, white, soft, cottony insects which suck sap. (Remove with soft brush; discard badly infested plants.)

Mites

Stunted, deformed leaves and flowers due to cyclamen mite; glassy leaves, to broad mite; yellowing to red spider. (Discard deformed plants; dust foliage with sulphur; space pots so leaves do not touch; wash hands with soap before touching healthy plants.)

Chlorosis

Irregular yellow mottling on leaves. (Do not wet leaves; keep out of bright sun)

Amaryllis

Red fire disease

Red spots on leaves, flowers and bulb scales; flower stalks and foliage bent and deformed. (Remove and burn infected parts. Make sure new bulbs are healthy.)

Bulb flies

Maggots of greater or lesser bulb fly eat out centers and destroy basal plants. (Discard infested bulbs; or treat with hot water at 110-111.5°F for 4 hours.)

Mealybugs

May infest bulb scales and leaf bases. (Scrub off with nicotine sulphate and soap solution.)

Azalea

Red Spider

Leaves yellow, webby, mealy on underside (Grow at low temperature, high humidity; syringe foliage.)

Lace bugs

Leaves tipped whitish; brown spots underneath. (Spray with nicotine sulphate and soap.)

Chlorosis

Yellowing from too alkaline soil, iron unavailable. (Use plenty of acid peat in potting soil.)

Begonia

Mealybugs

White, dusty bugs in axils of leaves and branches. (Spray with nicotine-soap before blooming, or syringe with pure water, or remove with toothpick swab.)

Aphids

Serious injury from melon aphids and others if numerous. (Syringe with water, or spray with nicotine-soap solution; during blooming use rotenone or pyrethrum)

Leaf nematodes

Discolored russet areas in leaves, which curl up and drop. (Keep plants well separated; avoid handling or wetting foliage; dip leaves in hot water (115-118°F.) for 3 mins.)

Mites

See African Violet

Blight

Grayish mold on leaves and flowers (Avoid syringing; remove infected parts.)

Leaf drop

Foliage loss from too heavy, wet soil, hot dry air, or draughts. (Use porous soil, cool room, high humidity.)

Calla Lily

Root rot

Leaves streaked, flowers malformed and brown. (Destroy infected plants and soil).

Soft rot

Base of stem and corms decayed. (Discard infected plant corms.)

Aphids

Occasionally numerous on leaves. (Spray with nicotine-soap solution.)

Cacti

Mealybugs

White, fuzzy insects at base of spines causing yellowing. (Remove with pointed brush; try mist spray nicotine sulphate or pure water (plant on side); at last resort use Volck 1-50, wash off later with water.)

Root mealy bugs

Live in soil on outer roots; may kill plant. (Remove from pot, wash off soil and insects repot in clean soil.)

Scale

Grayish, circular, hard-shelled insects. (Scrape off with stiff brush.)

Cacti con't.

Red spider

Mealy cobwebs over yellowish surface.
(Mist spray of water with plant on side.)

Rot

Decay starting around wounds or depressed areas. (Do not water from above or over-water; cut out infected parts.)

Crassula

Mealybugs

Neglected plants often covered with bits of white fluff. (See Coleus).

Mites

Leaves rusty brown, rough, finally die. (See Cyclamen)

Cyclamen

Mites

Leaves deformed, curled; blooms distorted; plant stunted due to mites too small to see with naked eye. (Spray with nicotine-scap solution or rotenone, or dust with sulphur; space so that leaves do not touch; immerse in nicotine solution or hot water at 110°F. for 15 mins. try a small ball of paradichlorobenzene in pot.)

Rot

Soft, slimy rot at crown; plant wilts. (Water from below; do not wet crown.)

Yellowing

Yellowing and drooping after plant leaves florist. (Keep in cool sunroom (not over 60°F) and place pot in saucer with an inch of water.)

Dracaena

Red Spider

Minute eight-legged mites which cause yellowing of leaves and general debility of infested plant. (Sponge foliage weekly.)

Leaf spots

Brown areas, yellow margins, black dots in center, or tip blight. (Cut off and burn infected parts; try copper carbonate as spray).

Ferns

Scales

Soft brown

Fern

Florida wax

Hemispherical

Low, convex, reddish-brown scale.

Males white, conspicuous, females ochre-brown.

Convex, oval scales

Large, convex, brown scales on fronds and stems. (Dip fronds in nicotine sulphate-soap solution or spray with Lemon Oil or Volck (With the exception of the Maidenhair); rinse thoroughly with water 3-4 hours after treatment; keep plant out of sun temporarily. Controlling ants will help.)

Mealybugs

Long-tailed type sometimes on fronds. (See scales).

Nematodes

Reddish to black bands from midrib to border of fronds caused by microscopic eelworms. (Remove and burn infested leaves or plants: can immerse Bird's Nest fern in hot water, 110°F., for ten minutes.)

Florida fern caterpillar

Fronds stripped at night by green or black white-striped caterpillars. (Spray or dust with rotenone or pyrethrum.)

Anthracoze

Tips of Boston fern turn brown and shrivel. (Keep foliage dry; remove infected leaves)

Tip blight

Loss of color; ash-gray spots with purple margins. (Spray with dilute (1-1-50) Bordeaux mixture.)

Sooty mold

Dark fungus growing in honeydew secreted by scales and mealybugs. (Control insects)

Fuchsia

White flies

Plants turn yellow, wilt, and are covered with minute white 4-winged flies, pale-green oval nymphs. (Spray frequently with nicotine-soap solution, or pyrethrum or thiocyanate spray; hit underside of foliage)

Mealybugs

White, cottony insects often present in leaf axils which suck sap causing yellowing and general debility of plant. (Control as for white fly; see also Coleus.)

Sooty mold

Growing in white fly honeydew. See Ferns. (Control insects).

Gardenia

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| Chlorosis | Yellow leaves due to soil too alkaline, iron unáavailable, too wet or too dry, too low humidity. (Keep pH of soil around 5.6 temperature 62°F.; put in sandy loam with 1/3 peat moss; if yellowing persists, apply ferrous sulphate to soil (1 oz. to 4 gallons of water.) |
| Bud drop | Buds yellow and drop off just before opening due to high temperature plus lack of sun. (Cooler temperature in winter). |
| Mealybugs | See Coleus. (Wipe off with cotton dipped in alcohol. See Coleus. |
| White flies | See Fuchsia. |
| Sooty mold | See Ferns. |

Geranium

(Pelargonium)

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|--------------------|---|
| White flies | Leaves turn yellow, drop, often covered with mold. (Spray with warm nicotine solution using excess soap and rinsing off next day. See Fuchsia.) |
| Mites | Young leaves curled, spotted, look scorched. (See Cyclamen) |
| Black leg stem rot | Cuttings rot at base, stems of older plants turn black. (Take cuttings only from healthy plants; use fresh or sterilized sand for rooting). |
| Blight | Gray mold over water-soaked areas in leaves and blossoms. (Avoid overwatering; keep tops dry.) |
| Ocdema | Water-soaked spots, turning corky--physiological disease. (Do not overwater in cloudy weather when respiration is reduced.) |

Ivy

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|------------|---|
| Red Spider | Leaves yellowish, cobwebby and sickly. (Prevent by weekly bath in cool water; if established, dip foliage in nicotine-sulphate solution or immerse for 30 seconds in water at 120°F.; grow at cooler temperature. |
| Aphids | Black lice clustering on new growth; leaves drop. (See red spider). |

Ivy con't.

- Scale Oleander scale (Males white, females buff) or soft brown scale. (Scrub off with soapy water or spray with nicotine-soap, Lethane, Loro, or Volck.)
- Mealybugs More common on grape ivy. (See scale, above, and Coleus.)
- Leaf spots Greenish, water-soaked spots turning brownish. (Avoid high temperatures and keeping the foliage too wet.)
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Jerusalem Cherry

- Gray mold Grayish-yellowing of leaves and fruit which shrivels. (Provide better aeration; avoid syringing.)
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Narcissus

(Paper White)

- Blind buds Buds do not develop or blast, due to starting too early, growing at too high temperature, insufficient water. (Start after October 15, root in dark then bring to light in cool room; keep roots covered with water.)
- Rot Bulbs decay. (Do not let water cover top of bulb.)
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Palm

- Scales Many species on leaves. (Keep leaves sponged off with soapy water. See Ferns.)
- Leaf spots Gray or brown spots. (Cut out infected parts.)
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Peperomia

- Ring spot Foliage disfigured with concentric zonal markings, probably caused by a virus. (Discard infected plants; keep free from insect.)
-

Philodendron

- Dying leaves Possibly due to root injury or too dry air. (Grow in water with piece of charcoal or in soil watered regularly.)

Poinsettia

- Mealybugs Common on underside of leaves and in axils (Remove with toothpick, wash with water, See Coleus.)
- Root aphids Yellow-green cottony lice infest roots. (Loosen earth ball and immerse in nicotine-soap solution at 110°F.)
- Leaf drop Leaves yellow and drop. (Keep Christmas plants in warm, light, humid room; do not place by cold windows at night.)
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Primrose

- Blight Gray mold on leaves and flowers. (Keep foliage dry; remove infected parts.)
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Rubber Plant

- Anthrachnose Tip burn and scorching of foliage. (Pick off and burn infected leaves. Do not let water stand on foliage.)
- Scales Several species on leaves. (Keep leaves wiped off, or spray; see Ferns.)
- Mealybugs At base of leaves and undersides, with sooty mold growing in honeydew. (Wipe off or spray; see Coleus.)
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Sansevieria

- Leaf spot Sunken reddish-brown spot, yellow borders. (Destroy diseased leaves; avoid syringing.)
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*Source - The Home Garden Magazine - December, 1945