

WINTER HOUSEPLANT CARE CHEAT SHEET

Quick Reference for Plant Parents

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WHY MINNESOTA WINTERS ARE UNIQUELY HARD ON HOUSEPLANTS:

- Indoor humidity drops to 10-20% (plants prefer 40-60%)
- Daylight decreases by 40% from summer levels
- Furnaces run 4-5 months straight, drying everything out
- Temperature swings of 20°F+ near windows

LIGHT

Minnesota Dec-Feb reality: Winter sun is 40% weaker than summer—plants notice!

Low-light winners (no extra help needed):

- Snake plant • Pothos • Philodendron • Dracaena • Spider plant

High-light plants need grow lights:

- Succulents • Cacti • Citrus • Herbs (yes, even rosemary!) • Some orchids

LED grow light schedule:

- Most plants: 12-16 hours/day
- African violets: 16 hours light + 8 hours darkness (triggers blooms)



GROW LIGHT TIPS

- Keep LEDs close to plant canopy (they stay cool)
- Bendy-arm lamps adjust to uneven plant heights
- South-facing windows aren't strong enough for high-light plants in winter
- Use a timer—set it once, forget it
- Budget option: retrofitted shop lights work great



TEMPERATURE & COLD WINDOWS

Ideal range: 65-75°F (most homes are perfect!)

The problem: Cold surfaces, not air temperature

Keep plants 3-4 inches away from:

- Exterior windows
- Exterior walls
- Drafty sliding doors

Trade-off: Moving away from windows = less light → may need grow lights



WATERING: THE WINTER PARADOX

You'll water MORE in winter (furnace heat dries soil faster)

THE LIFT TEST (more reliable than finger test):

1. Water plant thoroughly
2. Pick up pot—notice the weight
3. Check every few days:

- **Heavy = just watered, leave it**
- **Light = time to water**
- **Medium = check again in 2-3 days**

Why finger test fails: Unreliable in pots over 6" tall (top feels dry, bottom is soggy)

Terracotta dries 2x faster than plastic—plan accordingly

When in doubt, wait. Underwatering is easier to fix than overwatering.



HUMIDITY: THE MINNESOTA CHALLENGE

✗ **What DOESN'T work:**

- Misting (evaporates in seconds)
- Pebble trays (raises humidity <5%)

✓ **What DOES work:**

- Humidifier near plant cluster (aim for 40-50%)
- Group plants together (creates microclimate)
- Bathroom placement for ferns, calathea, orchids
- DIY terrarium for high-drama tropicals (introduce slowly)



FERTILIZER: YES, EVEN IN WINTER

Most houseplants aren't dormant indoors—they keep growing with steady temps

Use normal schedule if:

- Watering frequency unchanged
- Plant getting adequate light

Use half-strength if:

- Light has decreased significantly

Fertilize MORE often if:

- Watering more frequently (nutrients flush out faster)

Start with: Basic 10-10-10 (N-P-K) fertilizer—one formula works for everything



COMMON WINTER PESTS

Fungus Gnats (those tiny flies)

- Add 1/4-1/2 inch coarse horticultural sand to soil surface
- Gnats won't lay eggs in dry sand
- Use coarse, irregular sand (NOT play sand)
- Avoid overwatering

Spider Mites

- Often hitchhike indoors on clothing/outdoor plants
- Look for fine webbing on leaves
- Isolate affected plants immediately
- Increase humidity

Scale Insects

- Check leaf undersides and stems for brown bumps
- Wipe off with rubbing alcohol on cotton swab



WINTER STRESS SIGNALS

What your plant is telling you:

- **Stretched, leggy stems** → Not enough light
- **Brown leaf tips** → Humidity too low
- **Yellow leaves + droopy** → Overwatering or cold stress
- **Leaf drop near window** → Temperature shock (move 4" away!)
- **Pale new growth** → Needs more light



BULLETPROOF MINNESOTA WINTER PLANTS

These tolerate our low light + dry air:

- **Snake plant** – Water every 3-4 weeks, nearly indestructible
- **Pothos** – Tolerates neglect and low light
- **Philodendron** – Forgiving, fast-growing
- **ZZ plant** – Nearly impossible to kill
- **Spider plant** – Survives anywhere
- **Dracaena** – Slow but steady

Beginner succulent: Jade plant (needs bright light but more forgiving than most)



WINTER SUCCESS RITUAL

Laura's daily routine (and now mine):

- 🔄 Turn each plant a quarter turn (promotes even growth)
- 🏹 Lift three pots (get a feel for their weight)
- 👁 Look for one new leaf or one problem spot (celebrate or address it)

"Talking to your plants doesn't make them grow—but your attention does."

Pay attention. Turn your plants occasionally. Lift the pots. Celebrate new leaves. Enjoy the ritual.



HAVE A WINTER PLANT QUESTION?

Email Diana: Diana@dianapierce.com

Subject: Plant Question

I'll compile common questions and work with Laura to answer them in future newsletters.

