

How To Care For Your Air Plants



Watering

The first step of proper air plant care is to ensure the leaves receive the right amount of moisture. Many people think that air plants can live on air alone, hence their common name. But that's definitely not the case. Instead, the name air plant comes from the fact that the plants don't require soil to live, instead deriving their moisture and nutrition from the air.

Since your home probably isn't a humid forest where air plant watering occurs via the rain and the relative humidity, you'll have to water your air plants in one of two ways.

- Watering air plants via misting: For this method, use a spray bottle or plant mister to spritz air plants with water every day or two. After spraying the entire plant, place the damp air plant on a towel to dry for a few hours before putting it back in its decorative container or arrangement.
- Water air plants in a bowl or sink of water: This is the best method of watering air plants as it really allows the water to soak into the plants. To water air plants this way, fill a bowl or sink with water and float the air plants in the water for 20 minutes to an hour every week. Then, take the plants out of the water, tip them upside down so any excess water can drain away.



Water Types

There are several different kinds of water you can use to water air plants, regardless of whether you're misting them or soaking them. Here are some tips for the type of water to use when watering air plants.

1. Do not use softened water as the salt present in it can build up in the plant leaves.
2. Do not use distilled water.
3. If using tap water, allow it to sit at room temperature for 24 hours for the chlorine to dissipate.
4. Spring water or rain water is the best choice.
5. You can also use aquarium or pond water to water air plants as it contains several dissolved nutrients, but do not apply any other fertilizers if you water with aquarium or pond water.

How often to water air plants depends on how dry your house is. It also depends on the conditions of the room your air plants are kept in. Bathrooms and kitchen make great air plant homes due to their high moisture levels after showers, dish washing, and other humidity-generating activities. Rooms where fans are left constantly running are poor choices for air plants. The moving air causes the plant to dry out more quickly.

Signs that your air plant needs to be watered more frequently include curling or rolling leaves, leaves that fold together, or browning of the outermost leaves. Typically the green-leaved air plant varieties need to be watered more frequently than the gray-leaved ones.

If you keep your air plant inside a vessel, such as a terrarium, take it out prior to watering. Then allow the air plant to fully dry before returning it to its decorative setting.

Light

The next step in air plant care is to consider how much light to give your plant. For air plants, bright but filtered light is best. A west, east, or south-facing window will do. If you don't think your air plant is getting enough light, supplemental lighting via a fluorescent light or a table-top grow light helps.



Tillandsias enjoy spending the summer outdoors, but be sure to put them in a location with filtered sunlight. Direct sun during the hot summer months can “fry” them. And be sure to move the plants back indoors before fall’s first frost.

Fertilizer

Fertilizing air plants isn’t a difficult task, nor is it an essential one. Though a monthly or quarterly application of fertilizer helps air plants thrive, if you skip this step, it’s not the end of the world, especially if you water air plants with rain water or water from an aquarium or pond.

To fertilize air plants, use an air plant-specific fertilizer or a bromeliad fertilizer a few times a year. Another option is to use a regular, water soluble houseplant fertilizer at 1/4 of the recommended strength. Add the diluted fertilizer to your irrigation water, and the plants are fed and watered at the same time. Do this regardless of whether you water via misting or by soaking the plants in water.

Extra Tips

Other than choosing the correct location, and properly watering and fertilizing air plants, there are only a few other air plant care tips to consider.

- If any leaves at the base of the plant die, simply pull them off with your fingers or cut them off with a sharp pair of plant grooming shears.
- If any leaves turn brown at the tips, cut the brown, dead growth off with the grooming shears. Do it at an angle, so the trimmed leaf blends in with the healthy ones.
- Keep air plants away from both cold and hot drafts that dry them out.
- The ideal temperature for air plants is between 50 and 90 degrees F.

