



# Horticulture

## Landscaping the front yard

### Humidity in home effects plants too



Dry air in your home not only makes you feel uncomfortable, but it also harms your plant's growth. Moisture in the air is measured in terms of relative humidity. Most houseplants grow best at 40 to 60 percent humidity, but can tolerate levels as low as 20 percent.

Unfortunately, home heating systems take moisture out of the air, and houses commonly have lower than a 20 percent humidity level in the winter. How do you tell if your plants need more humidity? Look for these danger signs: brown and shriveled leaf tips, dried up flower buds and blooms and yellowed leaf edges. Entire leaves may turn yellow, wilt and fall off the plant. Many flowering houseplants are sensitive to low humidity levels, including African violet, azalea, cyclamen, impatiens, bromeliads and dwarf citrus trees.

The foliage plants which

prefer a more humid environment include the thinner leaved plants such as ferns, philodendron and spider plant. Cacti and succulents are native to deserts and they can tolerate low humidity levels.

You can minimize the damaging effects of low humidity to your plants by following proper watering practices.

Plant tissue dries out because the plant loses water from its leaves faster than it can take water up from its roots. Our plants have a harder time when you forget to water them and the soil dries out. Water plants before the soil dries out completely.

You may also need to increase the humidity around your plants. The easiest way is with a humidifier, which can increase humidity levels by 25 to 30 percent. Use portable units or humidifiers installed as part of your home's heating system.

Another option is to grow plants in a waterproof tray with an inch of pebbles, crushed rock, sand or perlite. Water up to but not above the level of stony material. Make sure the pots themselves do not sit in water or the plants risk getting root rot.

Put your plants where humidity levels are highest, such as the bathroom or above the kitchen sink. You might want to group many plants together. As the plants give off moisture, they help create a moist environment for the whole group. (MJM)

Winter brings a slower pace to gardening and gives the gardener time to think about past and future successes. Now is a good time to think about the home landscape and how it can be improved. An attractive front yard can enhance the appearance of your house and neighborhood. The expanse of lawn and surrounding plants creates the most pleasing picture if designed or planned rather than allowed to take shape on its own.

How you plant the front yard depends mainly on your house. In most properties the house is the prominent feature. All plants, driveways, fences and other items are meant to complement it. Shrubs and trees unite the house with its surroundings by softening vertical lines and making the building seem a natural part of the terrain.

The two major landscape design areas around your house are at the corners and doorway. Your front door, a beacon to

visitors, is the house's focal point and short plantings on either side of it are appropriate. Taller plants are suitable for corners, where they will funnel the viewer's eye toward your doorway plants and front door. Houses that are too tall appear shorter if the corner plantings extend like wings on each side, with the tallest plants at or near the corners.

Trees frame the house, focusing interest on it as the main feature of your property. Plant trees whose mature size is in scale with the house, or low houses will look dwarfed and tall houses will appear even taller than they actually are.

Select trees to match the house design. Steeply angled roof lines and dormer windows call for pyramidal trees such as spruce. Trees with rounded or horizontal form, maples and dogwoods, are better companions for the low lines of a ranch type dwelling.

Low shrubs and ground



covers along house walls provide a smooth transition from building to lawn. Shrubs along the front wall reduces the apparent height of a tall building. Having open spaces with natural mulches and ground covers in the planting can make low-built houses appear more massive.

The simpler a planting near the house, the better. Use only a few kinds of shrubs, but plan for some variety in size, form and texture. Consider adding areas for flowers or ornamental grasses, but keep these at a minimum height. Select shrubs whose natural height and growth

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### Amaryllis— Save that bulb for next year



What do you do with that amaryllis bulb you got for Christmas now that it is done flowering? Throw it out? NO! With proper care you can get it to bloom again next year.

When blooming ends, and the danger of frost is past, amaryllis plants can be placed outdoors in a sunny spot. Sink the pot to the rim in a flower bed among your other garden plants. The bulb is storing food for next year's flowers during this time so proper watering, fertilization and light will pay dividends in larger or more flowers next year.

In the fall, watering and fertilization should stop, the yellow leaves removed close to the top of the bulb, and the pot moved indoors to prevent freezing. Place the pot in a cool cellar to "rest" until around the first of the year. Start watering and fertilizing once new growth begins. (MJM)

### Air layering tropical plants

Air layering is a simple method of propagating indoor ornamental plants that have become overgrown. No special growing facilities are needed. All that is needed are sheets of plastic, tape, twist ties and sphagnum moss.

The idea behind air layering is to create a damp, temperate environment on the stem to encourage root growth. The plant will do the rest. The newly rooted branch is cut and then potted as an independent plant. Rooting time varies from a few weeks to a few months.

Tropical plants can be air layered almost anytime. Roots seem to grow faster when layering is done during late winter through spring, while the plant is actively growing. Have the following

tools ready: a sharp pruning knife, moistened sphagnum moss, rooting hormone, clear piece of plastic, tape and twist ties.

Choose a branch that is at least pencil-thick. Many

tropical plants will root anywhere along the stem, but layering at the node is recommended.

Remove the leaves at the node. Make a diagonal cut one-third to one-half the way through the stem just below the node. Angle the cut up toward the node. If you want to use a rooting hormone, dust the powder into the fresh wound. Take a handful of wet sphagnum moss and squeeze out the excess water. The moss should be damp, not wet. Using plenty of moss, apply it to the prepared stem and squeeze it in. Wrap the plastic around the moss. The plastic should fit snugly to maintain a moist environment as the roots grow.

Seal the vertical seam with tape. Cut the excess plastic and secure the ends with the twist ties. Leave the plant in its original environment. Water and fertilize as usual. In several weeks, roots will appear in the moss. At this point remove the plastic, cut off the newly rooted plant and pot it. (MJM)

### 2000 January/February Garden Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3	4	5	6 Avoid walking on frozen lawn	7	8
9	10 Review last years garden journal	11 Make garden plan	12 Check stored vegetables for signs of rot	13 Make list of new plants to try	14 Make a list of seeds needed	15
16	17	18	19 Check bird feeders	20	21 Check amaryllis bulbs	22
23	24 Check landscape plants for snow damage	25	26 Check plants for rodent, rabbit or deer damage	27	28 Order seeds	29
30	31	1 Check houseplants for insects	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9 Do a germination test on saved seeds	10	11	12
13	14 Air layer leggy house plants, like rubber plant	15	16 Cut flowering shrub branches for forcing	17 Check bird feeders	18	19
20	21	22	23 Start perennial flower seeds indoors	24	25 Prune fruit trees	26
27	28	29				

Many of us need reminders. That is the purpose of this calendar. Check the calendar each month and follow the recommendations if they are necessary in your landscape situation. (MJM)