

## Horticulture

### Houseplant Problems

Living plants of various kinds are a popular addition to the decor of many homes, restaurants, and other business places. Foliage and flowering plants serve as accents and helps soften hard architectural lines and wall surfaces. They improve quality of living.

Although less harsh in many respects, the average indoor environment presents some unique problems for normal plant growth. Light intensities in homes tend to be low, especially during fall and winter. Low light results in small leaves, pale color, long spindly stems, and flower failure. Lowered atmosphere humidity from the heating of homes causes rapid loss of moisture from plant surfaces, the soil surface and the outside surface of porous clay pots.

There are a number of other stress-inducing factors that may cause problems. Most people over water their houseplants. This can cause root rots that impair ability to replace moisture loss. A plant may outgrow the pot so its top is out of balance with the amount of soil in which the plant is growing. Such plants quickly exhaust the supply of water present in the soil and must be watered more frequently. Constant watering sometimes compacts the soil and reduces air space, which deprives the roots of adequate oxygen. This can reduce root development and plant growth. The soil may become "channeled" so water drains too rapidly and fails to thoroughly wet all of the soil in the container.

Determining the cause of some houseplant problems may be difficult and require skilled laboratory diagnostic procedures. Other problems are relatively simple to diagnose. Described below are some of the more common disorders and diseases, their possible causes and suggested corrective measures.

Leaf spots are quite variable in appearance, depending upon the cause. Spots caused by injury from direct sunlight on shade-requiring plants usually are large with margins. Each spot may involve the entire portion of the exposed leaf. The injured area appears bleached, gradually turning tan to brown, and eventually collapsing. Leaf spots resulting from chemical injury or exposure to temperature change due to droplets of

cold water usually are smaller. They generally are yellowish at first with margins conforming with the shape and size of the drops of chemical solution or water that caused the injury. A number of leaf spot diseases are caused by fungi and bacteria. Symptoms usually are small, water soaked spots, gradually enlarging and turning brown. There also may be considerable yellowing around the margins of the spots.

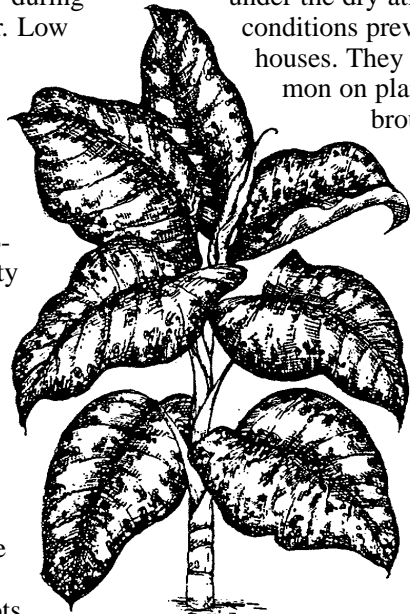
These diseases rarely develop under the dry atmospheric conditions prevalent in most houses. They are most common on plants recently brought into the state from southern propagating areas. Leaf spots occasionally develop in the vicinity of feeding injury caused by sap-sucking insects, such as aphids, scale, and mealybug. Plant surfaces in the vicinity of these insects often are

covered by a glistening, sticky honeydew. To control leaf spot you can: remove and destroy affected leaves, avoid sprinkling water on the foliage, provide adequate air circulation. If insects are involved, correctly identify the pest causing the problem. Control sap-sucking insects by washing leaves, petioles, and stems with a damp cloth or treating with a commercially-prepared pyrethrin spray for houseplants. Rubbing alcohol may be applied to insects such as mealybugs with cotton swabs. Systemic insecticides will control sucking insects.

Yellowing leaves are often caused by nutrient deficiency, especially nitrogen, but also may occur as a result of a sudden reduction of light intensity. Dieffenbachia, dracena, and rubber plant are especially susceptible, as are larger pot-bound specimens of other plants. Applications of nitrogen fertilizer may reverse the development of this condition when yellowing has just started. Be cautious about fertilizing plants during the winter months. Plants growing under low light intensities easily are injured by over-fertilization.

Leaves and succulent shoots that become limp or wilted, usually recovering when water is supplied. This may be evidence of water shortage or over-abundance of water followed by the development of root rot. To control wilting: check drainage, check for root rot, check for conditions promoting unusually rapid loss of water, alter watering schedule.

Proper care of your houseplants will insure you will be able to enjoy your plants for years to come. (MJM)



### Holiday Safety for Your Home

The holiday season is here! If you are like me, you are excited about the holidays and have already started or maybe even finished decorating the house and yard.

Many of you put your Christmas tree up right after Thanksgiving. This year you may have decided to have a real tree. Be sure to select a fresh tree. If you cut the tree yourself you know the tree is fresh. But if you do not cut your own tree, be sure to ask when the tree was cut and check it closely for drying needles. Dry greenery and Christmas trees can be a fire hazard this time of year in your home.

The stump of your Christmas tree should be cut fresh before placing the tree in the tree stand. Keep an adequate supply of fresh water covering this fresh cut at all times. Check the water level daily, and refill

when needed. The cooler you can keep the room where you have the Christmas tree, the longer it will stay fresh and green. Do not place the tree near a heat vent, wood stove, or fireplace.

At the first sign of needle drop and drying you should dispose of the Christmas tree. A single spark can ignite a dry tree. Use some of the discarded tree material as a mulch over dormant perennials or as a haven for wildlife in a nature area.

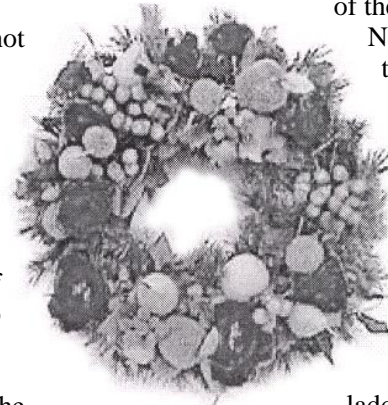
Holiday greenery used for decoration should also be watched very carefully for signs

of drying. Evergreen boughs and wreaths can dry in just a few days. A cigarette ash or match could easily start a fire in one of these centerpieces.

Never leave an unattended candle burning. Blow out candles in these centerpieces after the meal is over.

When decorating landscape trees and the exterior of the house, be careful. Make sure

you have a sturdy ladder and someone to help hold the ladder when you are stringing lights in high places. When you are on a ladder, do not lean out or reach. Climb down and move the ladder to a better location. Please have a safe holiday season. (MJM)



### Gifts for The Gardener

Need an original or unique gift idea? Here are some gift suggestions for the gardener in the family or someone who just appreciates the outdoors.

Holiday plants are always a welcome gift to any home. They add color and holiday accents to interior surroundings. The traditional red poinsettias are popular, as are the newer flower colors of pink, white, and yellow. Other possibilities are Christmas cactus, red gloxinia, and kalanchoe.

The outdoor gardener might like to receive a certain tool to make the job of spring gardening easier. Soil working tools like rakes, hoes, and spades may be difficult to wrap and still be a surprise but they are always welcome. Pruning tools, like hand shears and small saws, are easier to wrap and may be needed later this winter.

Don't overlook the possibility of a gardening magazine or plant book as a gift. Many larger book stores have well stocked sections on these and

related topics. Garden centers and nurseries offer a variety of titles on individual plants as well as cultural practices. Someone with a new home might like a book on plant materials and landscaping. While people with a well established garden and landscape might better use information on maintenance and pruning practices.

If you have a non-gardening friend or relative you want to introduce to gardening, consider a total package with plant, container, and growing media along with a book on plant care.

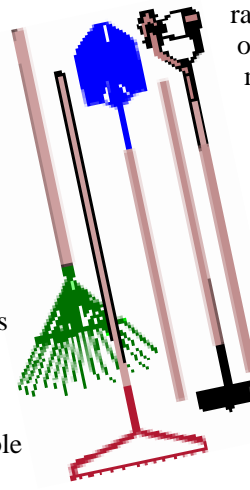
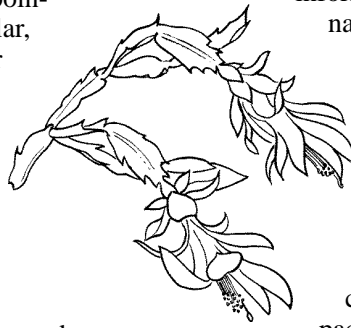
There are many gift ideas for people who like to spend their time at the many state parks in the area. To make their adventure more enjoyable consider giving them a 2001 state park car pass to get into the park, a compass, and identification books on wildflowers, birds, insects, butterflies, trees, tracks, or mammals. Other useful items would include

binoculars to look for things far away, pocket magnifier to see small things close up, sports or explorers watch, canteen for water, camera with film, hiking boots, sunscreen, and insect repellent.

Gifts for people who appreciate the outdoors in their own backyard might like bird feeders with bird seed or a compost bin. Other gifts might be a birdbath, bird or bat house, butterfly raise/release kit, outdoor thermometer, rain gauge, wild flower or native grass seed.

Some people may just wish to sit back, relax, and enjoy the outdoors. Gifts for them may include a

porch swing, garden bench, hammock, and a subscription to NEBRASKAland magazine. (MJM)



### Winter Protection for Roses

Hybrid teas, floribundas, grandifloras, miniatures, and climbing roses need protection from low temperatures and rapid temperature changes to prevent winter injury or possible death.

Bush type roses are protected by hilling or mounding soil around the base of the plants. Begin by removing fallen leaves and other debris from around each plant. Mound soil 8 to 10 inches around the canes. Place wood chips or shredded leaves over the soil mound for additional protection.

Providing winter protection for climbing roses is a little more difficult. The canes must be removed from the trellis and carefully bent to the ground. Cover the canes with a few inches of soil and then mulch with wood chips.

Winter protection should be in place by late November. The materials should be removed before growth begins in the spring, usually early April. (MJM)

