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Houseplant lighting in the winter

Winter months not only bring cold temperatures but reduced daylight hours. This can sometimes cause trouble for houseplants that are not getting enough sunlight to properly photosynthesize. Luckily, plants have many ways of communicating their needs to the grower. If a plant receives too much or too little light, the plant will display a stress response to alter you of its needs.

It is important to note that not all plants need the same amount of light. Some house plants do well in low light and do just fine in the winter while others need full sun to thrive. Those of us who have brought in our flowers, succulents and other outdoor plants to overwinter in the living room may have plants that are trying to tell us something.

Too much light? Indoors, too much light is typically a concern for plants kept in a south or southwest facing window. Artificial lights that are kept too close to plants or left on for too long can also cause stress. Similar to how we get sunburns, plants can get injuries on their leaves from excess light. If your plants are beginning to display spots on the leaves that are pale or faded this could be symptoms of excessive light.

Too little light? Plants with insufficient lighting are not able to efficiently produce chlorophyll. Consequently, they may lose their green coloring turning to a paler shade of green or even white. As the plants attempt to grow toward the light source the stems can become elongated or “leggy.” Leaves may drop prematurely and flower buds may not develop. Plants that should be variegated may become solid in color.

If low light is a problem for your indoor growing, consider getting fluorescent or LED light fixtures. Lights that are marketed for plants should come with instructions that tell you how far away the light needs to be from the plant. Reading about the light requirements for your specific plant can also help you determine how long to leave the lights on. You may want to consider getting an outlet timer for your lamps.

Your plants should tell you if the light is not properly adjusted. If the plant leaves burn, move the lamp further away or shorten how long you leave the lamp on. If the stems stretch, move the lamp closer or leave it on longer.

Its important to note that there are other factors that can cause your plant to look unwell, such as temperature or humidity. But paying attention to how your plant responds to changes in light can help you to provide the best conditions possible for your plant to thrive.