

Cultivate Creatively

Houseplants thrive (and don't necessarily need as much natural light as you might think), a garden functions like an art gallery, and a hillside retreat has resort-like features.

LEARN WHICH
indoor plants
are best for your
home—and how
to keep them alive
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THE LIGHT LOCATION

Pick the perfect spot to keep your houseplants happy



With a fervor

that rivals the heyday of houseplants decades ago, new generations are accenting living rooms, bedrooms, home offices and even baths with greenery. Think of it as “interior-scaping,” says best-selling author Barbara Pleasant in *The Complete Houseplant Survival Manual*. “Plants are moving indoors as living art—and more.”

“Lush plants bring interiors to life,” says Samantha Owens who’s helped a growing number of customers select in-home greenery and sleek containers at her Encinitas nursery, Barrels & Branches. “Houseplants help purify the air. They make us

feel good. People are hungry for that.”

If you’re adding houseplants to help create a beautiful interior for your home, you’ll need to know what growing conditions are perfect for the particular plants you like—and the key to success with houseplants is placing them in locations that provide them with their needed amount of light.

Both east- and west-facing windows receive some direct light, depending on the time of day. North-facing windows receive the least direct light, while south-facing windows receive the most. But even the sunniest interior rooms often provide less light than shady locations

outside, notes *The California Master Gardener Handbook* in its detailed chapter on houseplant selection and care. Natural sunlight through a window is not as strong as sunlight outside. So, how can you determine the amount of light a room contains?

Here’s a simple test to help gauge available light: Hold your hand about a foot above a white sheet of paper at the spot the plant will call home. A bold shadow indicates high light; a fuzzy shadow is low light; anything less is the equivalent of deep shade and houseplant hell.

Match your light test results to plant needs when houseplant shopping and share your gar-

dening know-how with nursery staff too. They’ll help you find your favorite plants. When you get home, your light tests will help you determine where your plant will be happiest.

Light needs for plants vary greatly. In general, most plants with blooms need to be within three feet of a sunny, south-facing window and plants with brightly colored foliage need more light than others.

Here are a handful of houseplant suggestions for numerous locations in your home. Since every home condition is different, be sure to try various settings. When your plant is giving you its best performance, you’ve found its perfect placement.

If you have east-facing windows...



Try Instagram's favorite houseplant, the **fiddle-leaf fig** (*Ficus lyrata*) with its skinny trunk and dramatic flared leaves, which "makes a statement," says Samantha. Not for novices, this finicky African rainforest native demands evenly moist soil, warmth and to be kept away from drafts and strong sunlight—i.e. that afternoon sun from a south- or west-facing window.

CARE TIP: If your plant exhibits droopy foliage and leaves that look pale or spotty, those are signs that it's not getting enough of the bright, indirect light it needs. To

bring it back to its healthy self, move it to a west- or south-facing location for a little while.

If you have south- or west-facing windows...

Pot a **False Aralia** (*Schefflera elegantissima*) that thrives in rooms with lots of bright light. Slender serrated leaves on this schef-



flera relative radiate around tall stems, creating airy foliage umbrellas in shades of copper and dark green.



CARE TIP: To prevent leaf drop, don't let it dry out and mist regularly.

Another option for rooms with loads of light is **Sansevieria**. These forgiving plants like bright light with at least some



direct sun for several hours a day, but they tolerate low light (as long as it's not deep shade) and dry conditions too, making it a good choice for first-time houseplant owners. The common names of mother-in-law's tongue and snake plant don't do this sculptural plant justice. Stiff, thick blades mottled, striped and splashed with silver, gold and cream are "very contemporary and very trendy," says Samantha.

If you have east- or west-facing windows...

Instead of tired lucky bamboo, use **Ming Aralia** (*Polyscias sp.*) to bring bonsai-like flair to desktops and accent tables. Often variegated foliage ranges from oval to lacy and finely cut. Showcase these Asia natives in a simple container, Samantha suggests. Avoid light, temperature and moisture extremes to keep this tropical native happy.

CARE TIP: It will best like being near a window where it will receive partial sunlight—preferably in the morning.

An east- or west-facing window also works best for **Monstera** (*Monstera deliciosa*), an old easy-grow favorite with a new cache. Commonly known as Swiss-cheese philodendron, this arty Mexico native boasts large deep-green arching leaves

with graphic splits and holes. Tough and long-lived, with no messy leaf drop, it adds tropical flair to both cool contemporary and bright boho rooms with filtered, indirect light.



CARE TIP: Avoid harsh sun. Mist regularly to provide moisture to its thick aerial roots.

If you have north-facing windows...

Pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*) should be your go-to choice. These plants are easy to care for and never go out of style. Freshen the look with variegated cream and green 'Glacier' or chartreuse 'Neon' suspended with a handmade macramé hanger.



CARE TIP: Overwatering and constant soggy soil can be deadly to this low-light lover. If growth is too slow or leaves are growing too far apart, the spot you have chosen is too dark. Try placing the plant in a room with average light conditions but keep it away from very bright spots.

Killed a houseplant or two?

Besides proper lighting, proper potting, watering and spacing are necessities to keep houseplants alive and good looking.

SAMANTHA SUGGESTS growing houseplants in cactus mix to ensure good drainage. Never allow them to sit in standing water or to dry out completely. Feed annually with slow-release fertilizer high in nitrogen.

REPOT TO A LARGER CONTAINER "when there are more roots than soil," she says. Signs include diminished growth and roots popping through drainage holes or above the soil line.

MONTHLY, take containers outside and water deeply to flush the soil. Then shower foliage to wash away accumulated dust. Avoid leaf-shine products.

GOOD AIR CIRCULATION helps ward off diseases and pests, so don't crowd plants. But keep in mind that strong breezes and cold can be damaging.