
HOUSE RULES

The secret of co-habitation? Observe, observe, observe. Plants don't just die overnight. If you give them a little once over every Sunday morning, Bloody Mary in one hand and mister in the other (as I do), you will soon notice how they are doing. For happy plants, follow these rules.

1. DON'T PUT STYLE BEFORE SUCCULENT!

Or any other type of plant for that matter! Sure, that cactus will look fantastic in your basement, but if this sun-loving desert plant is getting no light, it will be miserable. Go back to its roots (see pages XX–XX) and put it where it will be happy. Don't panic, there will be alternative plants that love those conditions. Once you know what you can provide your plants, no space is too small! You can put them everywhere. Be daring. Don't be afraid to move plants around, but keep an eye on them. If they look unhappy in their new home, try somewhere else. Buddy up plants with similar needs to make it easier to look after them. Keep the relevant tools at hand in each room, from rainforest humidity-making misters in the sitting room to DIY fertilisers in the kitchen.

Psst! Take a leaf out of other people's plants

OK, not literally (although you can sometimes, see page XX). Looking at where other people keep plants happy is a shortcut to success. Is there a restaurant or estate agent's on your street with a big happy jade in the window? When you peer into your neighbour's front room (we all do it), do you spy a healthy fiddle fig? Does the balcony three floors down bloom with bamboo? Or is the girl with the desk opposite you smugly watering her cacti collection? If these people can grow those plants in those places – so can you.

2. LET THERE BE LIGHT.

So many people come into my shop asking if a plant can survive without light. The simple answer is, NO! CAN YOU? House rule no. 2: All plants need light to grow. Why? Time for the science bit, concentrate: plants combine carbon dioxide from the air with water from their soil to make the nutrients they need to survive. This is called photosynthesis. Still with me? For this process to happen properly, plants need energy, which they get from the sun. Without light, they won't get enough energy and will die. How much light a plant needs depends on how they have adapted in their native habitats – desert plants need full beams but some bog dwellers can survive on hardly any at all. But when I say 'hardly any at all' I don't mean none. Capiche?



Never eat shredded wheat

So now you know you need light, how much do you have in your home? First, you need to work out which way your windows face to understand how much light they get. Not sure how to do that? Just use the compass on your phone! Remember, even if you're south facing, have you got a massive tower block opposite? Make sure enough light is getting through that concrete view.

North facing _____ South facing _____

Light: North-facing windows don't get much sun at all – think of them as a shady spot.

Watch out! Avoid putting sun lovers here, they won't be happy.

Hang out: Plants who don't like direct light will be very happy here.

Faves: Try a shade-loving Boston fern.

Light: South-facing windows get the best of the sunshine.

Watch out! In the summer things can really hot up, so watch your plants don't scorch.

Hang out: This is the perfect place for sun-loving plants.

Faves: Sunbathing succulents.

East facing _____ West facing _____

Light: East-facing windows get good amounts of light, but not as much as a westerly one.

Watch out! All that early morning light means it's more susceptible to frost.

Hang out: Plants that like indirect light will be A-OK.

Faves: Try an adaptable asparagus fern here.

Light: West-facing windows get good, warm light, but less than their south-facing cousins.

Watch out! If it gets really sunny, west-facing light can also scorch.

Hang out: Plants that need bright, indirect light will thrive here.

Faves: The big cheese plant.

Don't forget to turn the lights off!

It is important to remember that most of the plants on this planet have evolved in a day-night cycle. Therefore, they need a period of darkness to develop properly. If that has now got you worrying about plants in offices where the lights are always left on, remember many tropical houseplants originate from along the equator where they get about 12 hours of glorious sun all day, every day. So 24 hours of weak office light will just about compensate. Still, poor things.

3. LET IT FLOW, LET IT FLOW!

Just like humans, plants need air to breathe, so make sure your plant has good ventilation. Keep your windows open in summer to let the fresh air in. Most houseplants hate draughts (don't we all?) so avoid keeping them somewhere they are constantly going to get blasted! If you live somewhere where you can't open the windows, air-conditioning should still create a good breeze, but don't put your plants near the vents.

4. HUMIDITY IS RISING...

When we talk about humidity, we are talking about the amount of vapour in the air. If we go back to the roots of our tropical houseplants, they have grown to adapt to humid environments and will need these conditions to thrive. Kitchens and bathrooms are great spots for humid-loving plants because of the constant blasts of steam, but if you want to keep your tropical plants in, say, the sitting room, you need to consider that when you turn the radiator on it evaporates the vapour in the air, meaning that a centrally heated room in winter can be as dry as the desert – see the problem? But before you grab the frizz-ease, there are easy ways to increase humidity just around your houseplants, from a pebble tray to the good old mister. Check into the houseplant hospital to find out more (see page XX).

5. IT'S GETTING HOT IN HERE.

Those tropical climates are nice and warm, so houseplants are much happier inside than if they were out in our gardens. Compared with the tropics though, the lower light and humidity levels means that our homes are actually a bit cooler, especially at night, but that doesn't mean you need to start going to bed with the heating on. Most of the unfussy guys in this book will be 'just right' at home. But there are a few things to consider:

- If you have old sash windows, watch that your plants don't get too cold in winter, or consider desert plants that are used to chilly nights.
- Changing seasons also affect the temperature in your home. Like people, plants need more to drink in thirsty weather – and watch out for strong summer sun as it can give plants sunstroke.
- Plants from tropical and Mediterranean climates are not used to frost, so make sure their leaves don't touch the window panes on cold winter nights.
- Avoid putting your plants near radiators, as the constant changes in temperatures will upset them.

6. NO SPACE IS TOO SMALL

Once you've found your plant sweet spot, fill it! You can get a lot of plants in that space, trust me. I should know, in my one-bed shoebox flat I had over 40 plants of all shapes and sizes. My steamy bathroom was full of humid-loving rainforest plants and I crammed cacti into all my sunny spaces. Not only does it look wicked, but it's useful, too – putting plants together increases humidity (see page xxx) and you can keep an eye on the drink by watering them together. If you're looking at your tiny flat and thinking, no chance, remember, it's all about being creative with your space. The walls and ceiling have plant potential too! See Does My Cheese Plant Look Big in This (page XX) to get inspired.



ROOM GUIDE

Back to the roots

A lot of people come into the shop looking for a plant for a specific room in their home and get despondent if it doesn't fair well there. Just move it elsewhere and try again! Draughts, sun, radiators etc. all play a part in your plants' happiness. Don't be afraid to move them until you find their happy spot.

RAINFOREST ROOMS

Bathroom botanics

Bathrooms are great for creating a hot, damp rainforest climate and humid-loving plants who hail from these conditions are going to be very happy here. Rainforest plants often live in low-lying areas, shaded by the trees, so you won't need much bright light either. If your window is frosted, but still gets some light, think of it like the dappled effect of a tree canopy. Experiment with hanging moisture-loving fittonias off shelves, or placing ferns around the bath. Forget succulents though: these are desert plants who watch what they drink and will be miserable here.

The unused fireplace

Perfect for creating low light conditions for the adaptable spider plant. Ferns will also love it in this dark corner, but remember to keep the humidity levels up with regular misting.

Wicked witch of the north-facing windowsill

North-facing windows don't get direct sunlight so are great for shade lovers from the rainforest floor. Look for plants who can adapt to low light conditions and particularly hate direct sun. The maiden hair fern, with her sensitive fronds, could relax here without worrying about getting scorched.

Fancy a cuppa?

Is there a lovely steamy shelf above your

kettle? Try a humidity-loving plant up there. Don't put it too close, but close enough to get a lovely blast every time you fancy a brew. Invite the fit fittonia over for tea and see how steamy things can get!

Dig the dishes

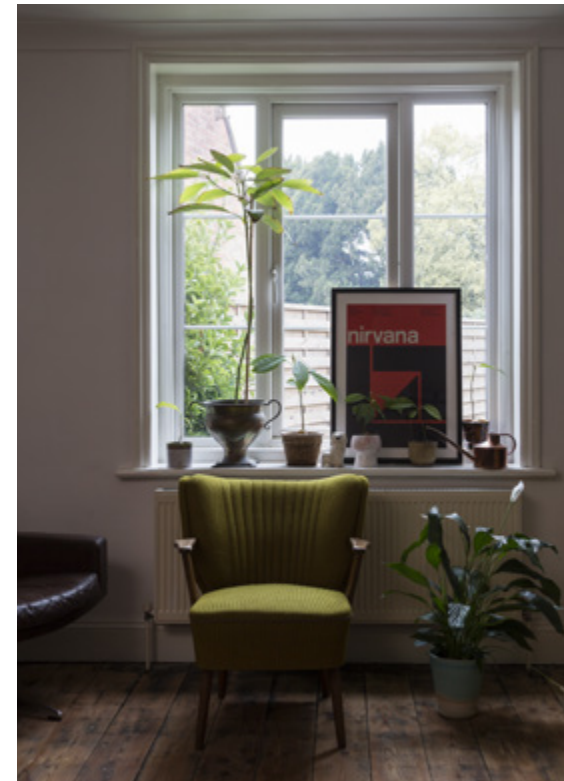
Think of all that energy a dishwasher uses, creating a nice warm patch in the kitchen – not to mention all that lovely hot air that floats around every time you open the door. Try letting a humid-loving bloodleaf plant hang out near your dirty pots and pans. This tropical dream is a little high maintenance but having it near water will suit it. Sadly, it doesn't do the dishes.

Swinging sitting room

I'm talking about sitting rooms with a window or two, so let's think about climates with bright but controlled light. Instead of those plants on the shaded rainforest floor, let's look at the ones climbing up towards the sun. These guys grow roots upwards to climb the trees, and the space in your sitting room will allow them to swing! Always shaded by the tree canopy, place them out of direct sun to ensure they are happy. As this is your main room, think big and statement: the big cheese of plants, the cheese plant, with its aerial roots, will thrive.

See the sky light

Plants native to the rainforest undergrowth, who have adapted to grow under the canopy may be very happy under a filtered or frosted skylight. A philodendron will be very content but remember that these guys like to climb, up, up, up towards the light, so be prepared to see it grow. Sun-lovin' succulents may also be happy hanging out in macramé under a sunny skylight (as long as it's not in the bathroom – too steamy). Try Burro's tail for the 'perfect from all angles' approach.





DESERT LANDSCAPES

South-facing windowsills

Succulents that hail from the hot, dry desert love a bright spot in your home with lots of fresh air. Your sunny windowsill is perfect. It is also handy to keep your cacti collection grouped together so you can keep an eye on them, making sure trips with the watering can are kept to a minimum. To make these guys really happy, let there be light! Rotate their pots so each side of the plant is getting rays. In summer, the window glass can refract and scorch your succulent sweethearts – if this looks like it's happening, move them where there is less direct sun but still plenty of light.

Sunny shelves

You know that spot on your wall that catches the sun? That, my friend, is a little succulent sweet spot. Time to get the drill out (seriously guys, you should know how to use one!) and set up a little shelf in its honour.

SUBTROPICAL SPACES

Holiday hang outs

These plants are laid back and totally chilled out, taking life as it comes. Like us on holiday, they like a bit of sun, a bit of shade and a nice amount of humidity but they're basically easy going guys and they're pretty adaptable, too. If you have a sitting room or hallway that gets a nice amount of sun during the day but not too much direct light, then this is the spot for them. One of my faves – the fittonia – can tolerate lower light levels, while palms like the kentia palm enjoy to wave their leaves somewhere a bit brighter. Subtropical plants won't mind a humid bathroom either but settle your rainforest pals in there first.

CLUB MED DESTINATIONS

Get out!

Plants from the Med like sun, shade and good drainage. Geraniums and scented geraniums are personal faves. Not everyone is lucky enough to have an outside space for plants, but there may be more options available to you than you realise. What about the steps going up to your front door? A window ledge you could (carefully) fix a window box to? As long as it gets light and you can get to it regularly (and safely!) to water your plant babies, your garden will most certainly grow! Just remember to keep an eye on them and bring them indoors if it gets too cold.

THE BOG

Queue for the loo

Anywhere there is a water supply nearby is great for your bog plants. No excuse not to water them every day! Also, for the carnivorous, they appreciate an open window for their daily treat of flies!

UP, UP IN THE AIR

Hanging out in hallways

Hallways with good light but little space are the perfect home for air plants. These guys can hang out on the walls, leaving room for all the other things that seem to accumulate on the floor. And they won't get knocked by dogs barging in! Because many of them start their life living on trees, they're used to bright conditions with some shade. If the sun gets weak in winter, move them somewhere a little brighter. Just give them fresh air, water and make sure they don't get too cold.

MORE PLANT POSSIBILITIES

No lighty? No likey

OK, OK I get it – it's dark and dingy but you're desperate for a plant to help turn that room into your yoga studio. You have two options, plant friend. 1) You send your plant to plant perjury where it will die a slow and painful death and swap it out with a new one every three months. Cruel. 2) You swap your plants around with others in sunnier spots so it gets respite in the sun every once in a while. I don't advise this, as it's a pain and your plant is not gonna be happy. If you're desperate, think about installing artificial lights (see page XXX).

Backed into a corner

No plant lover puts nothing in a corner! Don't let that empty space in your room go to waste. Some plants that originate from cool mountain forests, literally enjoy being up against a wall – used to the shade from the trees, these guys require little light. Devil's ivy is a great option and that unused corner will soon become a plant-climbing paradise, as it spreads out to find the sun.

The downstairs loo

You will want to put plants that can thrive in darker conditions in this special place. A fern will be very happy here, but you'll have to keep a mister by its side to keep up humidity levels. A moss terrarium will also do the trick. If you've got the space, philodendrons can look pretty wicked, or what about an unfussy hanging spider plant?

King of the kitchen

Kitchens vary in light, temperature and humidity, but often they will have a bright sunny window. This is the perfect place to grow your own edible plants. From

ridiculously easy-to-grow tomatoes or an avocado experiment to a chic indoor herb garden (see pages XX–XX), not only is it practical for cooking, the amount of time generally spent in the kitchen means you can keep a closer eye on your DIY plant babies, making sure they'll grow big, strong and delicious. Growing plants need a lot of water, so having a tap to hand is extremely handy. Watch them every day when you're washing up and you'll soon get to know their drinking habits. *Buon appetito!*

Bedrooms with benefits

Life = Stressful. Plants = Peace. The bedroom, where we get our R&R, will benefit from a helping hand from plants that purify the air, helping you relax, sleep and be happy. Besides, there is nothing quite like waking up and being greeted by the waving leaves of a big fiddle leaf fig. Luckily, there are lots of plants that have healing powers (see page XX). Again, the same rules apply when thinking about the climate in your room. If it is big and bright, what about a palm? If it's hot and humid (what are you doing in there?), rainforest plants will thrive.

Blustering balconies

If your balcony is on the zillionth floor of a tower block, or your outdoor space is exposed to the whims of the weather, choose coastal plants that are used to being whipped by the wind. Seaside pinks can pack a punch while grasses will bend gracefully, adding foliage, textures and instant 'high flying' style. Or try bamboo, which has adapted long sturdy stems to stand tall against the elements.

