

The right way to water houseplants



Watering houseplants seems like a simple thing, but many of us don't do it properly. Accidental drowning is the #1 cause of death for houseplants—and now is the peak season for drowning!

For some reason, we think that our plants benefit from a drink of water whether or not their soil is already moist. This is wrong! Roots need to breathe (just like we do). When we keep the soil constantly wet, there are no air pockets for roots to breathe.

It's like getting a drink of water from a drinking fountain. We can only take so many gulps until we need to pause for air. We need *both* water and air to survive. The same goes for plants. A constantly wet soil will suffocate plants and cause them to drown.

Here's how "the drip of death" almost always happens:

Phase 1: We water a plant that doesn't need it. The air pockets in the soil become full of water and the roots cannot *breathe*.

Phase 2: The suffocating roots begin to *rot*.

Phase 3: The rotting root system becomes weakened and can no longer pump enough water to the leaves. The plant becomes *limp*.

Phase 4 (the killing blow): We look at our limp plants and wonder, "How can this plant look thirsty when the soil is moist?" Out of compassion, we give the plant more water—but more water is the last thing the plant wants—its already *drowning*!

Phase 5 (death): The plant gasps its last breath. We can't give it mouth-to-mouth resuscitation since the plant doesn't have a mouth.

A moment of silence for the *dead* plant. — Silent pause —

Phase 6. The dead plant goes out into the compost pile, a victim of good intentions but senseless drowning. We scratch our head wondering what caused the plant to die, and we later tell our friends that we must not have a "green thumb." Soon we go to the garden center to select another plant, soon to become the next victim of accidental drowning.

The right way to water. The key to watering is to water when the soil needs it. Stick your finger one inch deep into the soil. If this soil is dry, then it's time to water. If the soil is moist, the plant does not need—or want—more water.

I see moisture meters being sold in stores. Why would you spend money on this device when your finger works just as well?

When you do water, do it thoroughly so all the soil becomes wet. Make sure water comes out of the drainage hole at the bottom of the pot. Use water that is at room temperature to avoid shocking the roots.

After about 30 minutes, dispose of the water that accumulated in the tray (don't dump it back into the pot since this water is full of salts and contaminants).

That's it. It's easy. Hey, your thumb is looking greener already!



NDSU EXTENSION SERVICE

Written by Tom Kalb,
Extension Horticulturist, NDSU
tom.kalb@ndsu.edu

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