

**Growing Houseplants in Colorado**  
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I grew up in New York City and knew nothing about growing houseplants. My mother was a wonderful cook, but growing plants did not quite match her cooking skills. She grew a rubber plant in some weird container and an ivy in a converted fish tank. While the plants somehow survived, they were never lush and green, and to this day I wonder where she got her “soil”.

When I first moved to Colorado, I didn't have an interest in gardening. It wasn't until a retiring co-worker asked me to care for her African violet. This simple request and beautiful violet changed my life forever. Through trial and error, my passion for gardening grew, and I've learned a thing or two:

1. Growing houseplants can cure your winter blues. Since most plants come from tropical climates, it's important to replicate that environment in your home—as much as you can. Many houseplants like the same temperature you like, but most homes tend to be dry in the winter. Tropical plants like the humidity to be around 50%-70%. Try sitting plants on trays with moistened pebbles, mist plants regularly or place a humidifier and fan near your plants to keep the air moist and circulating.
2. Watch for uninvited guests. Isolate all new plants you bring home and check for insect hitchhikers. If you find bugs, wash plants in the shower or spray with insecticidal soap to help keep your home pest free.
3. Read the plant tags—they are helpful about the growing conditions your plant prefers:
  - **Lighting:** Most plants need some sunlight to flower, but if your plant is not a bloomer, a semi-shaded area or placed in direct light from an adjacent room may be the perfect spot. Also, consider the temperature near your windows, especially in the winter—plants growing too close to windows may freeze. Cold, dark winters can also stunt growth.
  - **Water:** More plants have been killed with either too much water or not enough. Water when the top couple inches of the soil dries down, but never let your plants sit in standing water. Be mindful of your water source. Sometimes treated city water can result in foliage damage to plants. It's best to fill your watering can with water and let it stand for 24 hours before watering your plants to dissipate fluoride and chlorine.
  - **Repotting:** Another silent plant killer is space. When your plant's root ball outgrows its pot it can stunt growth or result in nutrient deficiencies. Repot

in a clean container 1-2 sizes larger than the root ball. It's best to use an all-purpose potting mix or one designed for the plants you're growing (i.e. cacti/succulent mix or African violet mix).

So, dig in, get your hands dirty and happy gardening. For additional information on growing house plants, visit: <http://www.cmg.colostate.edu/pubs/HousePlants.html>

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*The author has received training through Colorado State University Extension's Master Gardener program and is a Master Gardener volunteer for Larimer County.*

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