



WATERING INDOOR POT PLANTS

BY ASHLEY SEARLE

Water is an essential element to plant life but too much or too little water can be detrimental to the success of indoor plants.

A question I am commonly asked is: 'How often should I water my house plants?' While there is no one answer for all plants, there is a good general rule for efficient watering for indoor potted plants.

The key to successful watering is to allow the surface of the mix to become dry and then re-water enough to produce a little drainage from the drainage holes. Some plants will need watering more often than others. Plants that are in need of repotting may use up all the available water in the pot in a couple of days, whereas a freshly repotted plant may only need watering once a week, sometimes only once a fortnight.

The best method is to check the potting mix often and only water when the mix has become dry.

WATERING IN THE SEASONS

Plants use water in varying amounts in different seasons. As the temperature increases, plants use more water by transpiro-evaporating moisture from their leaves, a process which automatically helps the plant keep cool. As they do this, they draw up more moisture from the potting mix through their roots. As a general rule, plants will need watering more often in warm to hot weather and especially in dry, hot weather.

However, in cool seasons it is important to reduce watering as waterlogging can lead to root rot and decay.



Syngonium 'Aura'® Gold Allusion'

WATERING TIP 1

About half an hour after watering, tip excess water out of saucers during the cooler months of the year to avoid water logging in the bottom of the pot. This should not be necessary in summer as the plant will quickly use this excess water.

WATERING TIP 2

If the water puddles and does not soak into the potting mix, or if the water runs straight through the mix and out of the drainage holes, then the potting mix has become too dry and is repelling water. To correct this, sprinkle some Penetraide® onto the soil surface and slowly water in. The water will now soak straight into the potting mix, even after the mix has completely dried out.





HOW MUCH WATER SHOULD I APPLY?

It is wise to always use a saucer under indoor pot plants to avoid water spillage and stains on furniture and floors.

When you water, you should apply enough water to cause some drainage through the drainage holes into the saucer, but not so much that the saucer overflows. Of course, this is sometimes easier said than done as it is very difficult to always judge this.

The table below can be used as a general guide for watering pot plants. It describes various pot sizes (the diameter across the top opening of the pot) and the approximate volume of potting mix that each pot holds. When watering, apply around 25 per cent of the volume of the pot, which should be sufficient to rewet the potting mix without over watering. Wait for two to three minutes and if there is no water in the saucer, top it up with a little more water.

| POT SIZE (Diameter across pot) | POTTING MIX VOLUME | HOW MUCH WATER TO APPLY (Maximum) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| 12.5cm (5") | 800ml | 200ml |
| 15cm (6") | 1.5lt | 350ml |
| 20cm (8") | 4lt | 1lt |
| 25cm (10") | 8lt | 2lt |
| 30cm (12") | 15lt | 3.5lt |
| 40cm (16") | 25lt | 6lt |
| 50cm (20") | 50lt | 12lt |

NOTE: This chart is based on standard pots for volume measurements. The volume of water stated is an approximate guide to help prevent over-watering.

SHOULD I WATER FROM TOP OR BOTTOM?

Most pots are watered from the top and I find this the easiest method. However, some people do water from the bottom by placing the pot into a large saucer of water and allowing the potting mix to absorb the water from the bottom up. There are also special pots available that contain water wells for storing water in the bottom of the pot.

Either method works fine. Watering from the top has the added benefit of washing soluble nutrients and salts down into the pot, whereas bottom-up watering can cause a salt build-up on the potting mix surface, leaving a whitish crust over the potting mix and pot rim. To overcome this, occasionally take the pot outdoors or over a sink and give it a flush of water to wash the salts out through the drainage holes.

When watering from the top, gently apply water evenly over the potting mix surface and avoid over filling with water.



THE PLANT SHOWER

One way to truly invigorate your indoor plants is to give them a shower. Take your indoor pot plants and sit them in the shower, without their saucers. Turn the shower on lightly with cold water so that it washes over all the leaves and also waters the potting mix. Leave it on for about a minute, turn off the water and allow pots to drain for about half an hour. Then return your plants back to their position.

The plant shower is wonderful treatment for indoor plants. It washes all the dust off the leaves, saturates the potting mix and also helps leach the potting mix of any built up salt. Excess water just seeps away without any spillage onto furniture or the floor.

Give your plants a shower about once every month or two and you will find they will reward you with beautiful, clean and glossy growth.



African violet 'Tomorrow's Indigo'

WATERING AFRICAN VIOLETS

When watering African violets, allow the potting mix to become reasonably dry before next watering, but don't let it completely dry to the point of plant wilt. Water can be applied to the soil surface or from bottom-up watering from a saucer or container below the pot. One important point to remember is to not wet the foliage or leave water droplets on the leaves as this may cause leaf marking/spotting.

About half an hour after watering, tip out any excess water left in the saucer.

To learn more about the ins and outs of watering pots plants, both indoor and outdoor, purchase the **'All About Pot Plants & Hanging Baskets: A Growing Guide'** from your nearest ATG - About the Garden member.

