

The Indoor Garden: Let There Be Lights

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You can outwit Mother Nature all year long if need be. The revolution of indoor gardening is here to stay, and with the right lighting, you can achieve a bounty of blooms with the flick of a switch - and your adroit green thumb, of course. The following article identifies indoor lighting possibilities to suit all your indoor gardening needs as well as tips to make your indoor plants flourish.

Artificial lighting for your plants can be arranged anywhere for the gardener's convenience - in the living room that gets morning sun and even in the basement that gets no sun. Anywhere you can install lights and keep your temperature above 65 degrees is a good enough place to grow plants. In fact, there are even instances of gardeners revamping old bomb shelters into greenhouses with the help of artificial lighting.

Indoor lighting will even allow you to grow tropical plants providing you can keep you're the temperature for them above 80 degrees. For the gardener who is also the household chef, consider an indoor herbal garden for all your kitchen's needs. Artificial light is wonderful for delicate plants that aren't quite ready for the challenge of life in the outdoor garden. Many gardeners begin their flowers and vegetables from seeds indoors before it is warm enough to transfer them outside. Indoor lighting will allow them to thrive.

Generally, you should be able to find the lighting you need at any housewares store, but online garden stores and specialty garden centers may have more tips about using artificial lighting. In most cases, you will need to purchase both cool white and warm white fluorescent tubes that give great results for indoor gardeners and plant enthusiasts. Most plants will grow fine under either type of tube. Warm and cool refers to the color of the light waves (red or blue) - not to the amount of heat produced.

The shape of fluorescent tubes also sheds light uniformly. Of course, you can make over your whole basement as a plant haven and purchase more industrial type fluorescent lighting. There are even lighting systems with built in timers you can set to suit your plants needs.

There are alternative plant lights that can also be purchased. In places where a fluorescent light fixture might detract from the stylish décor such as a foyer or living room, an incandescent bulb could be used above a large foliage plant. Fluorescent bulbs use slightly more energy than incandescent bulbs, but they generate more than six times the light, making them more practical for indoor garden usage.

Where can you plant your indoor garden? How about in an old television cabinet. Mount two 20-watt fluorescent light fixtures to the top of the inside shelf and place your plants beneath. You can even mount a two-tube 24 inch fluorescent fixture on the underside of a kitchen cabinet and place your herbal plants beneath it. Lights can be suspended by chains from the basement ceiling and gardeners can then add a valance to protect themselves from glare that the lights produce while they are working with their plants. There are many places around the house you can transform into a garden center from a closet to an unused fireplace, wherever the gardener chooses.

Once you find a place for your plants indoors and install the light fixtures, you'll need to learn how much light and at what intensity specific plants require. Plants need darkness too in order to form their buds and bloom too. The type of plant will determine the distance it needs from the light and the length of time it must remain under it. If you are worried about the cost of keeping the lights on for long periods of time to accommodate your sun-worshipping plants, keep in mind that fluorescent lights were invented with gardening in mind. Also, fluorescent lights are known to be quite economical even when switched on for long periods of use.

While beginning indoor gardeners may face a period of trial and error when placing their plants under the lights, there are a few general tips that may prove helpful. For one, the length of your fluorescent tubes should correspond to the length of your garden. A good rule of thumb is to provide twenty watts of light per square foot. Initially, try to grow plants which will not exceed 12 inches in height; tall plants may need additional light accommodations.

Finally, there are several types of plants that are known to do exceedingly well under fluorescent lighting. Beginners may wish to try some of these in order to get the hang of gardening under artificial lighting. Some wonderful foliage plants to try include Swedish ivy, bush basil and coleus. Some great flowering plants include African violets, impatiens and wax begonias.