

# Quick Guide to Indoor Plants and Their Problems

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Most of the indoor plants listed are from tropical areas of the world including Africa, Southeast Asia, Central America and Australia. Many of them are under story plants making their light requirements lower than most plants. Members of the Araceae family are well represented in our interiorscapes. They are relatively problem-free, tolerate very low light in some cases (*Sansevieria*) and can also tolerate the extremes of temperature and irrigation that can be common in airports, malls and offices.

Insects and mites are the most frequent pest problems indoors. Mealy bugs are very common from cacti and succulents to palms, *Ficus*, and crotons. Spider mites including red and two-spotted occur on schefflera, palms, croton, *Cissus* (grape ivy) and dieffenbachia. A few key diseases are also problems including Erwinia (soft rot and leaf spot) on Aroids, cacti and a few others, *Cylindrocladium* root rot on *Spathiphyllum*, powdery mildew on *Cissus* and *Phomopsis* dieback of *Ficus*.

The most important thing to remember about pest problems indoors is that in most cases they were brought in with a plant. Examination of all new plants under bright light using a hand lens, checking in all of the nooks and crannies for mealy bugs and scales is critical. Diseases may not be as easy to find in a pre-installation check-up but they too come in with the plant in most cases. Check for cracks in stems, rotted lower leaves, powdery coatings and always, always, always check the roots.

An indoor plant broker brought 10 inch pots of huge *Spathiphyllum* to me when I worked in Apopka for the University of Florida. The tops were in perfect condition with no signs of any disease. The broker had not checked the roots prior to buying them or prior to installing them. Being less than respectful of plants I grabbed the tops and lo-and-behold the tops came out of the pots without any roots at all. Needless to say the broker was surprised but at least we knew we had *Cylindrocladium*. The table below lists some of the most common indoor plants, their family and geographical origin. I have also listed their moisture requirements, light level for good growth and common problems.

Plant	Family	Origin	Moisture	Light **	Common problems
Aglaonema	Araceae	SE Asia, China	Dry	Low	Mealy bugs, Erwinia, fluoride toxicity, bent-tip, chilling
Bromeliads	Bromeliaceae	Americas	Moist	Medium	Erwinia, scale, low humidity, root rot
Cacti	Cactaceae	Americas	Dry	High	Fusarium, scale, mealy bugs

Chamaedorea	Palmae	Central America	Moist	Low-medium	Mites, scales, mealy bugs, Pink rot
Cissus	Vitaceae	Americas	Slightly moist	Medium	Powdery mildew, mites, mealy bugs
Croton	Euphorbiaceae	Polynesia, India	Slightly moist	High	Mealy bugs, scale, mites
Dieffenbachia	Araceae	Columbia, Costa Rica	Slightly moist	Medium	Mites, mealy bugs, Erwinia, anthracnose, Dasheen mosaic virus
Dracaena	Agavaceae	Africa	Dry	Medium	Fluoride toxicity, Florida red scale, mites, Erwinia, mealy bugs
Ficus	Moraceae	Indonesia, Africa	Slightly moist	Medium to high	Mealy bugs, mites, scale, Phomopsis, water extremes
Nephrolepis	Polypodiaceae	South America, Florida	Moist	Medium	Scale, lack of water
Philodendron	Araceae	Mexico, South America	Slightly moist	Medium to high	Erwinia
Pothos	Araceae	Solomon Islands	Slightly moist	Low	None
Sansevieria	Agavaceae	South Africa	Dry	Low	None
Schefflera	Araliaceae	Australia, New Guinea	Dry	High	Mites, scale, mealy bugs, root rot
Spathiphyllum	Araceae	Central America	Very moist	Medium	Cylindrocladium
Syngonium	Araceae	Mexico, Central America	Moist	Medium	White flies

\*\* Light levels were designated as follows:

low = 50-75 foot candles

medium = 75-150 foot candles

high = greater than 150 foot candles