

## LIGHT NEEDS OF HOUSEPLANTS

Plants get their green color from the presence of chlorophyll. Think of the chlorophyll as a factory, which produces food for the plant. The energy to run this factory comes from light. If there is insufficient light, the chlorophyll factory shuts down and the plant may starve. Symptoms of insufficient light are pale, limp leaves or tall, spindly plants.

There are several ways to increase light levels. In the winter, when skies are often overcast, place plants in a south or west window. Grow plants in low light exposure using lights; 12-18 hours of artificial light will produce healthy plants.

Fluorescent lights are better than incandescent because they provide a wider spectrum of light without becoming too hot. Cool white fluorescent lights are adequate for growing most houseplants. Grow-lights, which provide light in the far-red spectrum, are only needed when growing seedlings, very young plants, or when forcing flowering plants. Even then, only one bulb is sufficient for good plant health.

Commercial light stands can be purchased or an economical setup can be created by using shop lights. Two or four-foot long fixtures are available for a modest price. Grow plants with their foliage 6-10 inches from the tubes. Do not allow leaves to touch the tubes.

Most plants require a certain amount of light to promote flowering. Indeterminate day plants flower with 10-18 hours of light per day. Included in this group are African violets, amaryllis, azaleas, cyclamen, fuchsias, gloxinias, miniature roses, Rieger begonias, and wax begonias.

Short day plants require only 10-12 hours of light per day. Longer periods of light will prevent flowering. Dark periods must not be interrupted with light. These plants include bougainvillea, Christmas cactus, chrysanthemum, gardenias, poinsettias and primrose.

Long day plants need 14-18 hours of light per day in order to bloom. Fewer hours will produce healthy plants, but longer days are needed for blooms. Included in this group are cineraria, heather, tuberous begonias and most annuals.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

[https://www.canr.msu.edu/lawn\\_garden/](https://www.canr.msu.edu/lawn_garden/)

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/outreach/>