

Indoor Plants

Unless you have a sunroom or greenhouse, the biggest dilemma of having plants indoors is providing them with enough light. Even if you have windows, they may be less than ideal if they're facing in a direction that gets little sun, or if they're shaded by a tree or porch overhang. Plants suffering from light deprivation are often lanky, with pale or yellowed leaves. Luckily, you can lend a helping hand with artificial lighting.

The best type of artificial light is fluorescent. Incandescent light doesn't provide the right kind of light for optimal growth, and it also produces lots of heat, which can burn your plants. Fluorescent light comes in several varieties: the standard ones, which you can find at any hardware store or home improvement center, are fine for growing small plants such as African violets, but for larger plants, go for higher-output fluorescents, which emit much more light and can be found at most well-equipped garden centers or through mail-order gardening supply catalogs. Bear in mind, too:

- * When growing plants under artificial light, choose those that prefer low to medium sunlight.
- * Keep your plants very close to the light source - no more than 6 to 12 inches away. The intensity of light diminishes drastically the farther away you move from it. To increase intensity, add more fluorescent tubes, grouped together.
- * Rearrange your plants regularly around their light source to ensure that they all receive equal exposure. The greatest amount of light is emitted from the center of a fluorescent tube.
- * Leave the lights on 14 to 16 hours each day. A couple of hours daily won't suffice. But don't leave the lights on all the time; plants need periods of darkness for rest.