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DIAGNOSIS OF COMMON HOUSEPLANT PROBLEMS

There are often there are multiple causes for many of the common symptoms exhibited by houseplants. Therefore, it is often necessary to do some detective work to determine the actual cause of the problem. As follows is a list of symptoms and the common causes.

RAPID DEFOLIATION: Extremes in temperature; changes in light (plant taken from bright light to relatively low light or *vice versa*); changes in location or other cultural practices; overwatering; under watering; or cold exposure.

GRADUAL DEFOLIATION (lower leaves yellow and fall): Overwatering (root damage); under watering (not enough water to support full foliage); lack of sufficient light; or lack of fertilizer.

NEW GROWTH WILTED, BURNED, OR BLACKENED: Too much fertilizer; cold drafts; hot drafts; too dry; sunburn; too warm; or freeze damage.

WILTING OF ENTIRE PLANT: Too little water; too much water (root rot); too much fertilizer (roots burned); or overexposed to cold temperatures.

SPOTTED FOLIAGE: Overwatering (check roots); burn from direct sun; cold water on foliage; bacterial or fungal infection (especially if plants are in very humid, wet conditions); or pollutants in the air (fumes from cleaning agents, gases, etc.).

TORN FOLIAGE: Animal damage (e.g., cats, dogs, rodents); children or adults (e.g., toys, maintenance equipment, carts, jewelry, chairs, doors, curtains, drapes).

OVERALL LIGHT-GREEN COLOR OF FOLIAGE: Low light conditions; too dry (soil or air); excess light (direct sun); or lack of fertilizer.

BROWNING OF LEAF TIPS OR LEAF MARGINS: Low humidity; excess fertilizer; poor water quality; excess of damaging ions in the water supply or soil (chlorine, fluoride, sodium, boron, soluble salts, etc.); deficiency of fertilizer; spray damage (insecticides, oil, leaf-glossing materials); unfavorable soil pH (too high or too low); or pollutants in the atmosphere.

STUNTED PLANTS: Excess fertilizer (causing root damage); too dry (lack of water); or overwatered (root damage).

NEW FOLIAGE SMALL, LIGHT GREEN, AND SPINDLY: Too little light; lack of fertilizer; or soil too dry.

LEAVES YELLOWING BETWEEN VEINS (veins remain green): pH either too high or too low; iron deficiency (when pH is too high or alkaline); or magnesium deficiency (when pH is too low or acidic).

CUPPED LEAVES, NUMEROUS SMALL LEAVES AT GROWING TIP, LEAVES CURLED, LEAVES DROP CONTINUOUSLY: Unburned gas injury; spray or vapor damage from cleaning fluids, industrial pollution, or general pollutants in the atmosphere. Aphid or mite damage.

TINY WHITE SPOTS ON LEAVES, COTTONY MASSES ON STEMS, ROUND OR OVAL-SHAPED BUMPS ON LEAVES OR STEMS, STICKY SPOTS ON LOWER FOLIAGE OR PLANT STAND: Usually caused by insects (primarily spider mites, mealy bugs, scale, and aphids). Look on undersides of leaves as well as top of foliage. A hand lens is usually needed since these pests are small.

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