

# Low Light Houseplants

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## Low-light houseplants to beautify your home

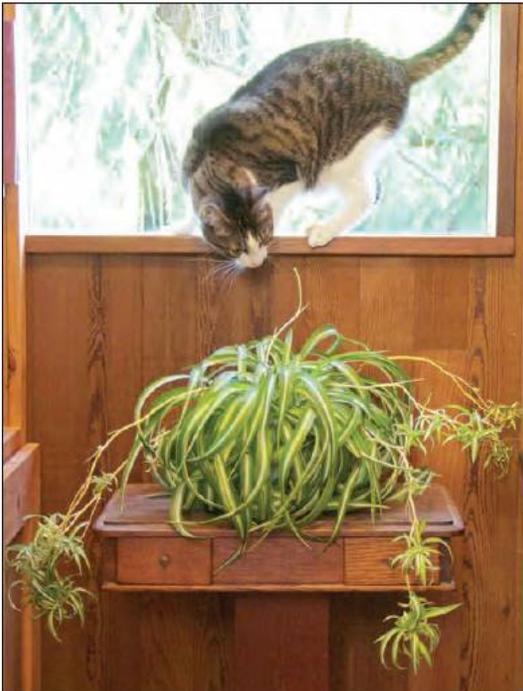
You have finally found that affordable little cottage in the woods that you have always dreamed of. After moving in you discover that there is little if any sunlight in any of the rooms. You had planned to fill your new home with plants. Now what do you do?

You can still fulfill your goal. Many of the houseplants you are already familiar with will tolerate lower light sources than you would think; in fact, they will even thrive. The whole trick is to pick the right plant for the right place in your new home. If you choose easy-care houseplants that have been proven to do well in low-light situations, you will be able to fill your new home with beautiful plants.

If the location is an east-facing or north-facing window, or any other place eight feet or more from a window with no direct light, it's a low-light area. This may include rooms with very small windows, skylights, hallways or basements. There are many plants that will adapt well to these locations.

- *Aspidistra elatior*, or cast iron plant, is known for its ability to adapt to poor soil, neglect and low light. At maturity its size can reach 24 inches in height and width. Several varieties have yellow or white variegation on the leaves.
- *Sansevieria trifasciata*, Snake plant, or mother-in-law-tongue, grows to two or three feet. 'Hahnii' is somewhat shorter (6 to 12 inches in height) with whorled leaves. NOTE: Plants are poisonous if ingested. Handling may also cause skin rash.
- *Peperomia* spp. is a small plant that can have variegated or solid color markings, with smooth or wrinkled leaves.
- *Zamioculcas zamiifolia*, or Zee Zee plant, is much like the aspidistra in size and tolerates neglect. It has an opposite-leaf pattern and that, coupled with its rich green coloration, makes it an attractive addition to your home. NOTE: All parts are poisonous if ingested.
- *Aglaonema* spp., or Chinese evergreen, is one of the easiest houseplants to grow because of its preference for shade. It grows to almost 18 inches high. Cultivars with deep green or variegated leaves are available and are excellent plants for purifying the air. NOTE: This plant can be poisonous if ingested.

- *Philodendron* spp. is quite possibly the easiest of all houseplants to grow. Most of the varieties seem to thrive on neglect. All are tolerant of indoor light and do well if the planting medium is allowed to dry out between watering. This is one of the best houseplants for air purification. NOTE: This plant can be poisonous if ingested. Handling may also cause skin irritation.
  1. The elephant ear (*P. domesticum*) has leaves up to 2 feet long
  2. The split leaf (*P. bipinnatifidum*) can grow to 6 to 8 feet tall
  3. The heartleaf (*P. hederaceum oxycardium*) is at home climbing a pole or vining down from a basket
  4. The red-leaf (*P. erubescens*) is also a sturdy climber with leaves 10 to 18 inches long
- *Chlorophytum comosum*, or spider plant, sometimes known as mother of millions, prefers indirect light. NOTE: This is one of very few plants that your cat can chew on and not get sick. It is also known as a top air cleaner.
- *Cissus rhombifolia*, or grape ivy, is a vining plant that prefers indirect or filtered sunlight like that on the forest floor. While it likes a humid environment, it does not like wet feet.
- *Chamaedorea elegans*, or parlor palm, boasts dense green foliage; yellow blossoms appear in spring. It will do well with little natural light. NOTE: All parts of the plant are poisonous if ingested.



**Left:** A spider plant is one of the few houseplants that will not harm your cat. The dangling baby “spiders,” which are offshoots of the mother plant, are tempting targets for felines. **Above:** Peperomias — more than 1,000 kinds — grow wild in the tropical and subtropical areas of the world. Many can be grown as an easy-care houseplant, but go easy on the water, as it is susceptible to root rot when grown indoors. *Photos by Christine Farrow / WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners*

This is only a partial list. With a few of these plants you can decorate your home according to size, type and colorations. Remember that some of these plants are poisonous, but if their toxic aspect is not a problem, they can add wonderful foliage to our homes, provide beautiful flowers and clean the air we breathe.

Pay attention to indoor plants wherever you go (a friend's home, a restaurant or an office building). Most are relatively easy to grow. And none like to be overwatered. Be adventurous and experiment.

### **RESOURCES:**

- University of Vermont Extension, Dept. of Plant and Soil Science. Dr. Leonard Perry, Extension Professor. Ailene King, Student Intern.
- University of Illinois Extension. "Types of Houseplants for Low Light." [urbanext.illinois.edu/houseplants/types\\_low.cfm](http://urbanext.illinois.edu/houseplants/types_low.cfm)
- Texas A & M Agrilife Extension. *Texas Master Gardener Handbook*. Compiled at Texas A & M University by Douglas F. Welsh, Extension. Horticulturist., and Samuel D. Cotner, Extension. Horticulturist.