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MEREDITH SPECIALS



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THE OHIO OWNERS OF BOUTIQUE PLANT STORES SHARE THEIR TIPS FOR DIAGNOSING HOUSEPLANT PROBLEMS AND BRINGING THE PLANTS BACK TO HEALTH.

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Emily and Brian Kellett,

owners of urban garden centers in Ohio and Pennsylvania, field questions about sick plants every day. "Why is my fig tree dropping its leaves?" posts one Instagram follower. Another person emails a photo with a question: "Why are the tips of my ZZ plant turning brown?" Some people even visit Stump Plants, the Kelletts' houseplant boutique, hugging their wilting, browning, or yellowing plant "babies" and hoping for advice to make their plants thrive again.

Like physicians, the Kelletts and their team of associates diagnose plant problems with a series of follow-up questions, such as "When did you last water it?" or "What is the light source—an east- or south-facing window?" Sometimes a physical checkup is required; they'll even pull the plant out of its pot and examine the roots. Other times, they dig deeper, sending a group text to their network of fellow houseplant experts.

The Kelletts are invested in helping new plant shoppers succeed. "It just takes the right plants to get started and having that community or store where you can go ask questions," Emily says.

As shoppers enter the store, Emily queries them about their lifestyles and living spaces' lighting situations, then she guides them to plants that match their needs. Before they leave, she writes up custom care cards for them to take home to keep their plants flourishing.

"We try to set customers up for success, so they don't think they have a black thumb and never try again," Brian says.

The couple know their customers have grasped some fresh plant knowledge when they come back in the store and say: "I'm shopping for a new apartment, and it has to have south-facing windows." No doubt, the Kelletts' prescriptions for plant care have boosted customer confidence so they can grow happier, healthier houseplants.



OPPOSITE LEFT Emily Kellett, co-owner of Stump Plants, writes up care instructions for each plant sold. OPPOSITE RIGHT Along with selling plants, each Stump store location hosts workshops and book signings. THIS PHOTO Emily and Brian Kellett have made it their mission to help each shopper find the best plant for their specific space.



PLANT GROWING KNOW-HOW

WATER

Water only when a plant needs it. One good way to determine if a plant needs water is to stick your finger a couple of inches into the soil. If the soil feels cold or moist, wait a day or two to water. If the soil feels dry and firm, it's probably time to water. As a general rule, the thicker the leaves, the less water a plant needs. For example, succulents and cacti have thick fleshy tissue that stores reserves of water, so allow soil to fully dry out before watering.

DRAINAGE

Purchase containers with drainage holes for aeration and for excess water to escape. Proper drainage prevents root rot. If your container doesn't have a hole or holes, place your plant in a plastic liner pot that has a hole and drop the liner pot inside a decorative container.

LIGHT

Before purchasing a plant, check out your home's lighting. What direction do your windows face? Some plants prefer bright south-facing windows; others prefer softer east- or north-facing light. Ask a plant store salesperson for help in selecting the right plant for your situation.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE
All store interiors feature custom display shelves created by Brian and his dad. Emily helps customers select containers then pots up the plants in the store. Planters include Ohio-made ceramic pots, custom artisan pieces, and many others. Brian is a fan of regular pruning, because it helps him monitor plants for pests and diseases in addition to keeping each plant the desired shape and size. The stores carry a variety of ceramicware, all made in the United States.



PROBLEM SOLVER

Emily and Brian Kellett share tips on how to fix common houseplant issues.



Emily and Brian regularly help customers diagnose plant problems.

DROPPING LEAVES

● YELLOWING OR BROWNING

If leaves that are dropping are browning or yellowing before they drop, check out care tips for "browning leaves" or "yellowing leaves," right.

● HAVE YOU HAD YOUR PLANT FOR LESS THAN 30 DAYS?

New plants normally drop a few leaves as they adjust to a new environment.

YELLOWING LEAVES

● LACK OF SUNLIGHT

Move the plant closer to a window or provide artificial light.

● OVERWATERING

Are leaves turning brown as well as yellow? Are the roots brown and squishy when you remove the plant from the pot? If so, pull away unhealthy roots, repot the plant in fresh soil, and allow soil to dry out between future waterings.

BROWNING LEAVES

● UNDERWATERING

Are leaf tips brown and crunchy? Is soil dry when you insert a finger into it? Thoroughly water the plant and trim away brown leaf tips.

● OVERWATERING

Are there brown tips or brown spots on the leaves? Is the soil wet when you insert a finger into it? Are the roots brown and squishy when you remove the plant from the pot? If so, pull away the unhealthy roots, repot the plant in fresh soil, and allow the soil to dry out before watering.

● SUNBURN

Are there brown spots in the center of leaves? Was the plant moved recently to a sunny porch or south-facing window? Move the plant away from the sunny window or to one that faces east or north.

WILTING LEAVES

● UNDERWATERING

Is the soil dry when you insert a finger an inch or two into it? Water the plant thoroughly in a sink until water runs out the pot's drainage hole(s). The wilting leaves should recover in a few hours.

● OVERWATERING

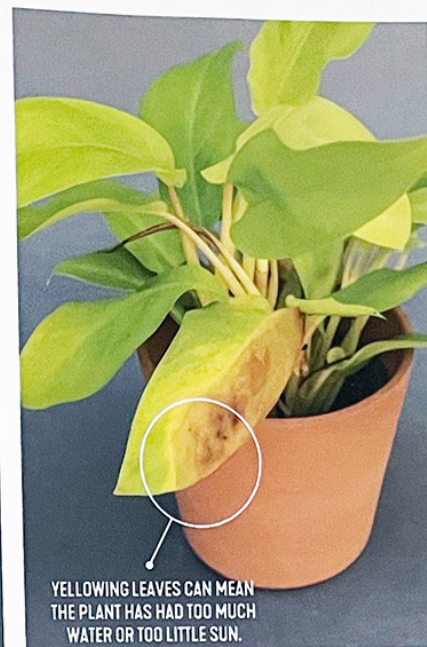
If soil is moist but leaves are wilted, the plant has likely been overwatered. Overwatering causes roots to rot so they are unable to take up water. Pull away the unhealthy roots, repot the plant in fresh soil, and allow the soil to dry out before watering again. Trim away leaves that turn yellow or brown.

● TOO MUCH DIRECT SUNLIGHT

Research your plant's light needs. If you find it's a low-light plant, move it away from direct sun or to a room with a north- or east-facing window.

● TEMPERATURE DIPS

A cold ride home from the store, a draft from a door, or a move outdoors can cause temporary wilting. Many houseplants are native to tropical climates, so they are sensitive to cold temperatures. Keep plants at 60°F–75°F and be patient as they get accustomed to their new environments.





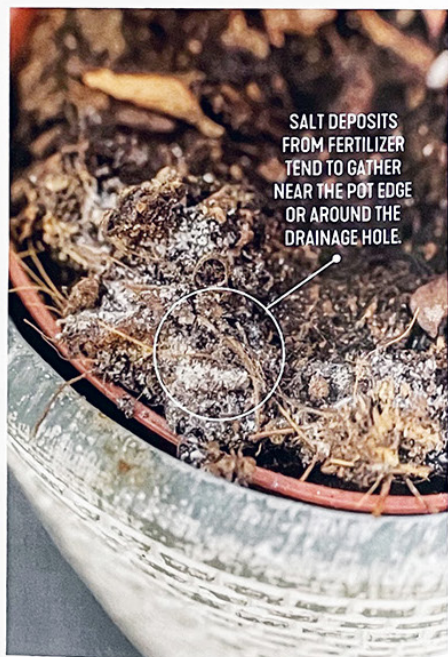
USE PRUNERS OR SCISSORS TO TRIM OFF SPINDLY LEAFLESS VINES.



TRIM OLD SHOOTS TO ENCOURAGE NEW BLOOMS.



WHITE SPOTS MAY BE CAUSED BY RESIDUAL FERTILIZER.



SALT DEPOSITS FROM FERTILIZER TEND TO GATHER NEAR THE POT EDGE OR AROUND THE DRAINAGE HOLE.

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SPINDLY PLANTS

● VINING PLANTS

Plants with long, stringy vines that have no leaves should be trimmed back to encourage new, leafy growth.

● LEGGY SUCCULENTS

Cut off the full top of the plant along with 1–2 inches of the stem. Replant it in a pot of fresh soil and it will eventually form new roots. (Discard the rest of the original plant.)

NO BLOOMS

● ORCHID

Trim the shoot, keep the plant growing in soft light, and patiently wait for a new shoot to emerge and bloom.

● BROMELIAD

Trim the bloom stalk from the mother plant. Watch for new offsets (“pups”) to emerge from the mother plant, which eventually dies after blooming. Divide the pups from the mother plant and replant them; with care, they will mature and bloom.

WHITE SPOTS ON LEAVES

● FERTILIZER RESIDUE

Many greenhouses add a fertilizer to their overhead watering systems that causes white deposits on plant leaves. Simply wipe away the spots with a wet cloth.

WHITE, CRUSTY PATCHES ON SOIL

● SALT BUILDUP

White, crusty patches on soil are usually built-up fertilizer salts. Scrape off the crusty surface and discard it, then flush excess salts from the soil by placing the pot in a sink and running water continuously through the pot; allow all water to fully drain away.

PESTS

Control pests by spraying or wiping pest-infested areas with soapy water (1 teaspoon soap per 1 quart water). A cotton swab works well for small areas. Repeat every week or two until you no longer see pests. It’s best to keep these plants quarantined in a different room or location to prevent pests from spreading to other plants.

● MEALYBUGS

Are there white fuzzy areas on the plants? Mealybugs commonly affect dracaena, ficus trees, hoyo, philodendron, pothos, and succulents.

● MITES

Are there white spots or webs on the undersides of leaves? Spider mites commonly affect aralia, bird of paradise, calathea, ivy, and palm trees.

● SCALES

Are there small shell-like bumps on the stems or leaves? Scale insects are often found on cacti, euphorbia, and ficus trees and are easily scraped off with a dull knife.



MEALYBUGS STRESS PLANTS AND CAN SPREAD AMONG THEM EASILY.

“WE TRY TO SET CUSTOMERS UP FOR SUCCESS, SO THEY DON’T THINK THEY HAVE A BLACK THUMB.”

—BRIAN KELLETT