

Soil Nutrient Analysis Laboratory

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Some moisture is also lost due to evaporation from the soil surface or the surface of porous clay pots. Liquid water is converted into a vapor when exposed to warm temperatures, and it dissipates into the air. The amount of water lost through evaporation can be lessened during prolonged periods of hot weather by double potting, or by covering the potting soil with a thin layer of organic mulch. Double potting is a technique whereby a smaller pot with the plant in it is inserted into a larger pot. Usually a layer of moistened sphagnum moss is placed in between the two pots.

Normally, tap water is used to water houseplants. Water at room temperature is preferable. Chemicals present in municipal water sources may cause injury to houseplants. Sometimes this is seen as a browning of leaf tips and margins. Some plant species are more susceptible to this type of damage than others. Filling the watering can and letting the water sit a day or so before using will often allow any harmful chemicals to dissipate.

Another problem with water quality may be noticed if a water softener is in use. Generally, sodium salts are used in this system, and they can accumulate in the

potting mix and injure the plants. Collect water from outdoor taps, which are often not connected to the water softener, or even the downspout of the rain gutter, or consider purchasing bottled water for sensitive houseplants.

Occasionally water sources will have an excessive level of alkalinity. This is determined by measuring the amount of carbonate and bicarbonate present in the water. This will cause the pH of the potting medium to rise above what is required by the plant and nutritional problems usually develop. Most water analyses test for this parameter.

Do evaluate both the water requirements of your plants and your watering techniques. Try out a self-watering container or wick watering system if you are a forgetful waterer at times.

The better you accommodate your plant's needs, the happier and healthier they will be.