



GROUND RULES
PLANTS . PURPOSE . WELLNESS

THE BEGINNER'S PLANT PARENT GUIDE

Simple, no-stress care for your first Pothos,
Monstera & Philodendron

A STARTER GUIDE FOR NEW PLANT PARENTS



Welcome, Plant Parent

If you've just brought home a pothos, monstera, or philodendron — congratulations. These three are some of the most forgiving, beginner-friendly houseplants out there, which makes them the perfect place to start. This guide covers everything you need for the first few months together: light, water, soil, and what to do when something looks off.

Five Things Every Beginner Should Know

1. More plants die from overwatering than underwatering.

All three of these plants would rather be a little too dry than sit in soggy soil. When in doubt, wait a few more days.

2. “Bright, indirect light” means near a window, not in one.

A spot a few feet back from a bright window, or beside a sheer curtain, is ideal. Direct hot sun can scorch leaves.

3. Check the soil, not the calendar.

Watering schedules are guidelines, not rules. Stick a finger 1–2 inches into the soil — if it's dry, water; if it's damp, wait.

4. Drainage holes are non-negotiable.

A pot without drainage traps water at the roots. If your decorative pot has no hole, keep the plant in its nursery pot and set that inside.

5. New leaves are the best sign of a happy plant.

Growth may slow in winter — that's normal. A steady trickle of new leaves in spring and summer means you're doing it right.



Quick Reference: At a Glance

Use this table to compare care needs across all three plants at a glance.

	POTHOS	MONSTERA	PHILODENDRON
Light	Low to bright, indirect	Bright, indirect	Medium to bright, indirect
Water	When top 2" dry	When top 1–2" dry	When top 1–2" dry
Humidity	Average is fine	Prefers higher humidity	Average is fine
Growth habit	Trailing vine	Climbing, large leaves	Trailing or climbing
Difficulty	Very easy	Easy–moderate	Very easy
Toxic to pets	Yes – keep away	Yes – keep away	Yes – keep away

A Note on Pets

All three plants in this guide are mildly toxic to cats and dogs if chewed or ingested. Keep them out of reach of curious pets, or choose a hanging spot instead.



Pothos

Epipremnum aureum

The classic “first plant.” Pothos is nearly impossible to kill, tolerates low light, and grows fast enough that you'll see real progress within weeks.

Light

Thrives in low to bright indirect light, making it one of the few houseplants that genuinely tolerates a dim corner or windowless office. It will grow faster and the leaves may develop more variegation in brighter, indirect light.

Water

- Water when the top 1–2 inches of soil are dry.
- Leaves will droop and feel a little floppy when it's thirsty — a helpful early warning sign.
- In winter, cut back watering frequency by about half.

Soil & Repotting

Any well-draining, general-purpose potting mix works. Repot every 1–2 years, or once roots start circling the bottom of the pot or poking through drainage holes.

Humidity & Temperature

Comfortable in normal household humidity and temperatures (60–85°F). No misting or humidifier required.

Common Issues

- Yellow leaves: usually overwatering — let it dry out more between waterings.
- Leggy, sparse vines: needs more light, or a trim to encourage bushier growth.
- Brown, crispy edges: underwatering or dry air; water more consistently.

■ **PRO TIP:** *Pothos roots readily in plain water. Snip a vine below a node (the little bump where a leaf meets the stem), drop it in a jar of water, and you'll have a rooted cutting — and a free new plant — in a few weeks.*



Monstera

Monstera deliciosa

Famous for its dramatic, hole-punched leaves, monstera is an easy grower once it has something to climb — and a favorite subject for plant-shelfie photos.

Light

Needs bright, indirect light to develop its signature leaf splits (called fenestrations). Too little light and new leaves will stay solid, with no holes.

Water

- Water when the top 1–2 inches of soil are dry — roughly every 1–2 weeks.
- Monstera is more sensitive to soggy roots than pothos, so always let excess water drain away.
- Drooping, heavy-looking leaves usually mean overwatering; wrinkled leaves mean underwatering.

Soil & Repotting

A chunky, well-draining mix (potting soil blended with perlite or orchid bark) mimics its natural rainforest floor. Repot every 2 years into a pot just 1–2 inches larger.

Humidity & Temperature

Prefers higher humidity (50%+) but adapts to average home conditions. A pebble tray or nearby humidifier helps leaves stay glossy.

Support & Growth

As a natural climber, monstera develops larger, more fenestrated leaves when given a moss pole or trellis to climb, rather than left to trail.

Common Issues

- No holes in new leaves: not enough light, or the plant is still juvenile.
- Yellowing lower leaves: normal in small numbers; frequent yellowing means overwatering.
- Brown crispy patches: too much direct sun or low humidity.

■ **PRO TIP:** Wipe dust off the leaves every few weeks with a damp cloth. Dust blocks light from reaching the leaf, and clean leaves photosynthesize — and grow — noticeably better.



Philodendron

Philodendron hederaceum

Heartleaf philodendron looks similar to pothos and is just as forgiving — a graceful trailing vine that's happy almost anywhere in the home.

Light

Adapts well to medium to bright indirect light. It will survive in lower light but grows noticeably slower and leaves will be smaller.

Water

- Water when the top 1–2 inches of soil are dry.
- Slightly more drought-tolerant than monstera, but avoid letting it dry out completely and often.
- Wilting is usually the plant's clearest signal that it's ready for water.

Soil & Repotting

A standard well-draining potting mix is fine. Repot every 1–2 years, or sooner for fast growers, choosing a pot only slightly larger than the current one.

Humidity & Temperature

Tolerates average home humidity well, though it will reward extra humidity with larger, glossier leaves. Keep away from cold drafts.

Common Issues

- Small, sparse leaves: usually needs more light.
- Yellow leaves with mushy stems: overwatering — check for root rot.
- Leggy vines with long gaps between leaves: trim and propagate to encourage fullness.

■ **PRO TIP:** *Philodendron and pothos look alike but are easy to tell apart up close: philodendron leaves are usually thinner and heart-shaped with a smooth edge, and new leaves emerge from a protective sheath called a cataphyll.*



Troubleshooting Guide

Most beginner plant problems come down to light, water, or both. Use this guide to diagnose what's going on.

SYMPTOM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Yellow leaves	Overwatering (most common) or natural aging	Let soil dry out more between waterings; remove yellow leaves
Brown, crispy tips/edges	Underwatering, low humidity, or too much direct sun	Water more consistently; move out of direct sun; raise humidity
Drooping leaves	Thirsty plant, or occasionally overwatered roots	Check soil moisture first — water if dry, hold off if wet
No new growth	Not enough light, or it's dormant season (winter)	Move to a brighter spot; growth naturally slows in winter
Small, sparse leaves	Insufficient light	Gradually move closer to a bright window
Mushy, dark stems	Root rot from prolonged overwatering	Remove affected parts; repot in fresh, dry soil; water less often
Tiny bugs or webbing	Pests — likely spider mites, mealybugs, or gnats	Wipe leaves with diluted soapy water; isolate the plant; treat weekly

Your First-Month Checklist

- Find a spot with bright, indirect light for each plant.
- Check soil moisture weekly with your finger before watering.
- Make sure every pot has a drainage hole (or sits inside one that does).
- Wipe leaves clean of dust once a month.
- Watch for one new leaf as a sign you're on the right track.

That's it — you're ready to get growing. Every plant parent kills a leaf or two along the way; what matters is paying attention and adjusting. Happy growing!