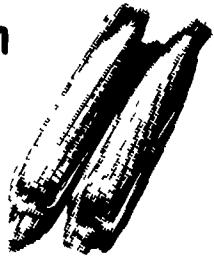




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For the avid gardener

NEWARK, Del. — There is a stark beauty in the midwinter landscape. But many of us miss the green foliage of warmer seasons. Thus the color that houseplants provide is especially appreciated at this time of year. A little care and attention to the humidity and light needs of your plants will ensure that they thrive throughout the winter.

"Lack of moisture in the air can harm plants," says Sue Barton, University of Delaware extension ornamental horticulture specialist. "To increase the humidity around your houseplants, place them on pans of moist sand or gravel, or bury the pots in large containers of moist peat moss. Grouping plants

together away from drafts and heat sources will help maintain the moisture around them."

Short winter days mean reduced light indoors. "Plants that look a bit off-color now are often misdiagnosed as nutrient-starved," says the specialist. "More likely, they're light-starved. Be careful to avoid overfertilizing plants during this period of slow growth."

Barton says you can avoid low-lighting problems by choosing shade-tolerant plants or using supplemental lighting. She recommends fluorescent lamps, as they won't produce excess heat or cause leggy plant growth. Cool white, warm white or specific grow

lamps should be placed four to 12 inches above the foliage. Lamps placed at a greater height are impractical, as they require much higher wattages to be effective, she says.

"Consider using a timed lighting

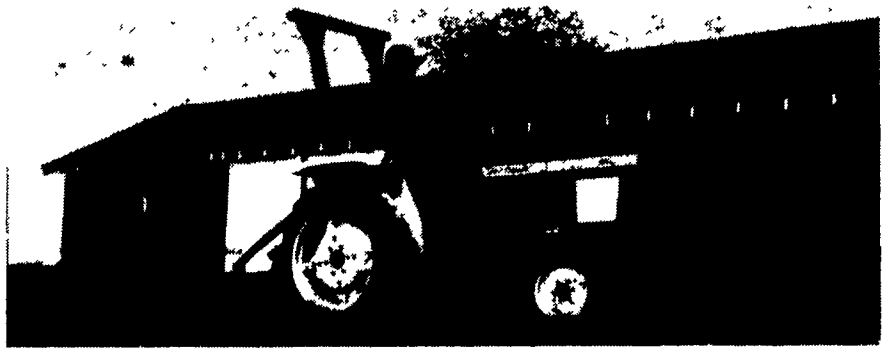
device so plants won't be victims of occasional forgetfulness," says Barton. "Sixteen hours of light a day is adequate for most plants.

"Make the most of natural and supplemental light by keeping houseplant foliage clean," she says. "Dust can settle on leaves,

filtering out needed sunlight. Remove it by washing the foliage with a mild soap solution and rinsing thoroughly."

With healthy houseplants your winter doesn't have to be all brown and white — at least not indoors.

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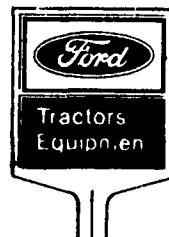
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