

Houseplant Care — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into hands-on practice with your own plants and home. Each section pairs with a course module and mixes guided exercises, fill-in worksheets, and checklists you will use at the windowsill and potting bench. Work through it with a plant, a light meter or phone app, and your watering can within reach, and keep the templates to track light, watering, feeding, and the health of every plant in your collection.

Reading Light and the Needs of Plant Families

Audit the light in every room, score each plant spot, and sort your plants into care groups.

Exercise: Light Audit of Your Home

Walk through your home with a phone light-meter app such as Photone, or use the shadow test, and rate each spot a plant could live. Measure at the height of the leaves, not at the window, and ideally at midday on a typical day. Doing this once removes most of the guesswork from plant care.

- Which window or spot gave the highest reading, and what direction does it face?

- Did the shadow test agree with the meter, with sharp shadows in your bright spots?

- Which spots fell into low light, under roughly 200 foot-candles, where only the toughest plants will cope?

- Where could a grow light open up a dim corner that has no usable window?

Worksheet: Plant-to-Light Match Sheet

For each plant you own or want to buy, record its care group and required light, then the light band of the spot you plan to put it in. Flag any mismatch so you can move the plant or pick a different spot.
Plant name (common and botanical)

Care group (aroid, succulent, fern, prayer plant, dracaena, ficus)

Light the plant wants (bright direct, bright indirect, medium, low)

Light band of the intended spot (from your audit)

Window direction of that spot

Match or mismatch?

Action if mismatched (move plant, add curtain, add grow light)

Checklist: New Plant Intake Check

- Identified the plant's botanical name and confirmed its care group
- Looked up its light, water, and soil profile
- Chosen a spot whose measured light matches its needs
- Inspected leaf undersides and soil for pests before bringing it near other plants
- Isolated the new plant for one to two weeks as a quarantine precaution
- Noted whether it needs filtered or distilled water (calathea, maranta, carnivorous)

Watering and Potting Media Done Right

Practice correct watering technique, replace the calendar with soil tests, and blend a proper mix.

Exercise: Soak, Drain, and Lift

Pick one plant whose soil has dried to its trigger point. Water it slowly with the soak-and-drain method until water runs from the drainage holes, let it drain fully, and empty the saucer. Lift the pot right after watering to learn its heavy weight, then again every couple of days.

- How long did it take before water ran freely from the drainage holes?

- How did the pot's weight differ between freshly watered and a few days later?

- Was the soil hydrophobic, with water running off the top, suggesting it needs bottom watering?

- Did you empty the saucer so the pot was not left sitting in standing water?

Exercise: The Three Moisture Tests Head to Head

On the same plant, run the finger test, a wooden skewer pushed to the bottom, and the lift test, and compare what each tells you. The goal is to learn which signals you trust so you can stop watering on a fixed calendar.

- Did the finger test (top one to two inches) agree with the skewer pulled from the bottom?

- Was the deep soil still damp even when the surface felt dry?

- Which test felt most reliable and easiest for you to repeat?

- Based on the results, did this plant actually need water yet, or could it wait a day?

Worksheet: Mix Your Own Potting Blend

Choose one plant and design the right mix for its group from the course recipes. Record the parts of each ingredient, then run the squeeze test on a wet handful and note the result.

Plant and its care group

Target recipe (aroid, succulent, tropical/fern, general)

Parts of base potting soil

Parts of drainage amendment (perlite, pumice, coarse grit)

Parts of structure or moisture amendment (orchid bark, coco coir)

Any extras (charcoal, worm castings)

Squeeze test result (held loosely then crumbled / too muddy / too loose)

Adjustment made to fix the squeeze test

Checklist: Watering Setup Done Right

- Every pot has at least one drainage hole
- No pot is sitting permanently in a saucer of standing water
- Decorative pots with no hole are used only as cachepots over nursery pots
- No gravel layer added at the bottom of pots as false drainage
- Room-temperature water used, not cold from the tap
- Sensitive plants get filtered, distilled, or rested water

Repotting, Roots, and Feeding

Read root-bound signals, repot one plant cleanly, choose pots with intent, and set a feeding schedule.

Exercise: Repot a Root-Bound Plant

Choose a plant showing root-bound signs and repot it following the course sequence, stepping up just one to two inches in pot diameter. Water it the day before so the root ball holds together. Work on a tray and have fresh mix ready before you slide the plant out.

- Which root-bound signals did you confirm before deciding to repot?

- What did the roots look like, and were any dark, mushy, or circling tightly?

- Did you keep the crown at the soil surface, neither buried nor exposed?

- By how many inches did you increase the pot diameter, and why not more?

Worksheet: Pot Selection Decision Sheet

For a plant you plan to repot, work through the choices that decide watering frequency and root health. Match the pot to the plant and to your own watering habits.

Plant and care group

Current pot size (diameter)

New pot size (one to two inches larger)

Pot material chosen (terracotta, plastic, glazed ceramic)

Reason for that material (dries fast / holds moisture / your watering habit)

Does the pot have a drainage hole? (must be yes)

Fresh mix recipe to use

Worksheet: Fertiliser Plan and N-P-K Reading

Read the label on your fertiliser and design a feeding plan for the growing season. Remember to dilute, feed only onto moist soil, and pause in autumn and winter.

Fertiliser product and its N-P-K numbers

What each number does (N leaves, P roots/flowers, K vigour)

Plant type and goal (leafy growth vs flowering)

Label-recommended strength

Diluted strength you will actually use (e.g. half strength)

Feeding frequency in the growing season (every 2 to 4 weeks)

Months you will stop or cut back feeding

Checklist: Repotting Day Run-Through

- Repotting timed for spring or early summer (unless rescuing a rotting plant)
- Plant watered the day before so the root ball holds together
- Fresh, group-appropriate mix and clean pot ready before starting
- Plant slid out by supporting the base, not yanking the stem
- Dead, dark, or mushy roots trimmed with clean scissors
- Plant set at the same depth with the crown at the surface
- Soil firmed lightly, leaving a watering gap below the rim
- Watered thoroughly, then held off fertiliser for about a month

Diagnosing Problems, Pests, and Propagation

Diagnose leaf symptoms in context, treat root rot, knock out pests, and propagate new plants.

Exercise: Diagnose a Struggling Plant

Pick a plant that is yellowing, browning, or dropping leaves and diagnose it by reading the whole situation, not just the leaf. Check soil moisture, light, last feeding, and any recent change before you decide on a fix.

- Which leaves are affected (old lower leaves or new growth) and what colour and texture?
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- Is the soil wet or dry right now, and what does that combination point to?
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- How much light does the spot get, and when did you last fertilise?
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- Did anything change recently, such as a move, a draft, or a nearby heat vent?
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- Based on the pattern, what is your single most likely cause and your fix?
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Exercise: Pest Identification and First Treatment

Inspect the undersides of leaves and the soil surface across your collection. If you find a pest, identify it against the four common suspects, isolate the plant, and begin the matching treatment. If you find none, practice the inspection so you can catch one early next time.

- Did you find webbing and stippling (mites), black flies (gnats), white cottony tufts (mealybugs), or brown

bumps (scale)?

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- Which plant is affected, and have you isolated it from the others?
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- What treatment did you start (insecticidal soap, neem oil, alcohol swab, sticky traps, drier soil)?
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- When is your next repeat treatment, five to seven days out, to break the egg cycle?
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Exercise: Take Your First Cuttings

Propagate one plant by the right method for its type: a stem cutting below a node for a vining aroid, or division for a clumping plant. Use clean tools and place cuttings in bright indirect light. Take a few at once so the strongest ones carry the day.

- For a stem cutting, did you cut just below a node so the node is on the cutting?
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- For a division, did each section have its own roots and shoots?
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- Did you root the cutting in water, moist mix, or damp sphagnum, and why?
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- What date did you start, so you can track the two-to-four week rooting window?
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Checklist: Root Rot Rescue Steps

- Unpotted the plant and rinsed soil off the roots to inspect them
- Identified rot: brown or black, slimy, mushy roots versus firm white or tan healthy ones
- Trimmed away all rotted roots back to healthy tissue with clean scissors
- Let the plant air out briefly before repotting
- Repotted into fresh, well-draining mix in a clean pot with drainage holes
- Watered sparingly afterward and corrected the cause (overwatering or poor drainage)
- Took a top cutting to propagate as backup if few healthy roots remained

Your Action Plan

1. Run a full light audit of your home and assign each plant spot to bright, medium, or low.
2. Complete the Plant-to-Light Match Sheet and move or adjust any plant that is in the wrong light.
3. Switch from a watering calendar to the finger, skewer, and lift tests, and log them in the Watering Log.
4. Blend a proper potting mix for one plant's group and confirm it with the squeeze test.
5. Repot one root-bound plant correctly, stepping up only one to two inches and keeping the crown at the surface.
6. Set a half-strength feeding schedule for the growing season and record it in the Fertiliser Schedule template.
7. Inspect every plant's leaf undersides and soil for pests, and isolate and treat anything you find.
8. Diagnose any struggling plant by reading soil, light, feeding, and recent changes before acting.
9. If you find root rot, run the rescue steps immediately and fix the underlying watering cause.
10. Take at least three cuttings or one division and track them to rooting in the Plant Care Log.

