



THE *LEAF* SUPPLY GUIDE TO CREATING YOUR

# INDOOR JUNGLE

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# FOUNDATIONS

Schooling up and laying the correct groundwork for your indoor jungle is the best way to create a sustainable and ultimately rewarding plant-filled space. Knowing exactly what your plants need to survive, as well as what conditions they will receive in your interior, will allow you to make informed decisions about the style of jungle that is best suited to you.

# analysing your space

WHEN IT COMES TO CREATING an indoor jungle, well before you hit the nurseries and plant shops, it's really important to analyse and understand the space you are dealing with. To give plants the best chance to survive you need to be realistic about the conditions you are able to provide. When bringing plants into our spaces we are looking to mimic as closely as possible the conditions they receive in their natural environment. At the top of the list of considerations is the level and type of light on offer, but that is closely followed by water and soil, as well as temperature, humidity and fertiliser.

Spend some time throughout your day watching the sunlight as it moves through your home and peeks through different windows. Where does the light reach? Do certain rooms get extra hot in the afternoon sun? Do these patterns change in the cooler months? Do you have air conditioning or heaters? Or a strong draught down particular corridors? Keep all of this in mind when you're considering where to place your plants.

From here you can look more closely at which areas you would like to fill. Is there an empty corner that could be brought to life? A shelf or bookcase that could benefit from trailing plants? A windowsill that is screaming out for some plant love? Is there an ugly cabinet that could use covering up? A particularly beautiful little nook that you would like to draw the eye to with a delightful plant?

Now for the fun part; it's time to combine all these investigations and find the perfect plants for the perfect positions.

› Morning light streams through the large windows to the communal kitchen in Sydney's luxe co-working space La Porte Deux. A Fiddle leaf fig is perfectly positioned to enjoy the bright, indirect light.



# getting inspired

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO SHORTAGE of places to find green inspiration when searching for ideas to create your own indoor jungle. We are stickybeaks from way back and love nothing more than peeking inside the spaces of amazingly creative plant people to swoon over how they have incorporated plants into their lives. From homes, studios and office spaces, to public areas and stores – we scoured the globe to find some of the most beautifully lush and inspiring places to include in the pages of this book. We gained invaluable insight chatting to the people who inhabit these verdant interiors, about how they've built their jungles, where their love of plants came from and, most importantly, why they love to live surrounded by them. Each jungle featured is unique in style and approach, showing that there are many different ways to bring plants inside. Here are some of the best places to get your greenspiration.

**SOCIAL MEDIA** Many of the spaces featured in this book belong to people we have long followed on Instagram. The visual feast contained within the millions of tiny squares on this platform is a constant source of inspiration for us. Follow plant people and hashtags, save and share images, and enjoy the unending supply of ideas and creative ways that people around the world are living with plants. Your first port of call: @leaf\_supply – where it all began for us.

**MAGAZINES, BOOKS + BLOGS** The seemingly ever-increasing popularity of indoor plants means that when browsing the pages of interiors magazines, books and blogs you'll find plant-filled homes galore. From suggestions about pots and vessels for plants to beautiful indoor specimens in architecturally designed homes, these medias can offer awareness of different products and ideas, allowing you to visualise how you'll bring them into your own space.

◀ Plant inspiration can be found everywhere. This incredible Ponytail palm greets guests staying at the Paramount House Hotel in Sydney.



Displays in plant shops, such as the gorgeous Nikau Store in Byron Bay, give inspiration of how to incorporate plants into our own spaces. Nikki and Nicole stock a beautifully edited collection of lush plants, florals, botanical wares and art. Good luck leaving empty handed!



**TRAVEL** Venturing to new cities and countries is another amazing way of being exposed to incredible plant-filled spaces. Hunting down greenhouses at local botanical gardens when visiting a new city is one of our favourite things to do. These often historical and intricate buildings are packed with some of the world's most incredible plant species. The air inside the greenhouses is crisp and fresh and we challenge you to not come away with a number of new plants added to your lust list. In London, the Temperate House at Kew Gardens (the world's largest Victorian glasshouse) is filled with some of the rarest and most threatened species of plants on earth and is absolutely worth a visit. Hortus Botanicus in Amsterdam is another of the world's oldest greenhouses and is equally inspiring. In Paris, try the multiple Grandes Serres (large greenhouses) of the Jardin des Plantes; in New York, the sweet Enid A. Haupt Conservatory in the New York Botanical Garden; and in Sydney, the Latitude 23 Glasshouse at the Royal Botanic Gardens houses some incredibly rare plants, such as the White bat plant (*Tacca integrifolia*). Three other personal favourites can be found in the botanical gardens of Berlin, Palermo and Basel. If you don't have the ability to travel, see what gardens exist in your local neighbourhood. You might be surprised what you find.

Feeling adequately inspired? Perhaps you're feeling a little overwhelmed by the seemingly endless options and ideas you've found. It's time to start editing down and nutting out your ideas. Create a mood board (Pinterest is great for this or go old school and make one IRL) with some of your favourite plants, pots and those images that really capture what you want to cultivate. Refer back to this regularly to make sure you're staying on track, but also don't feel that you are married to your initial ideas. It is absolutely fine for your vision and style to evolve as you begin to cultivate your indoor jungle.

# light

THIS IS WITHOUT A DOUBT the most important place to start when it comes to talking about plant health as, above all else, plants need light to survive. Light is integral to the process of photosynthesis, in which plants create their own fuel by utilising a combination of carbon dioxide and water and using light energy to convert it into glucose and oxygen.

Many of the plants that do well indoors hail from the tropics where they have adapted to growth in rainforests with dappled light, shaded by the tree canopy above. The term bright, indirect light is used to best describe this light situation but is fairly broad (read: vague) and can leave many new plant parents in the dark. This outdoor 'shaded' position protects the foliage from harsh direct sun in their natural environment but is generally far brighter than even the brightest spot indoors. Working out the quantity and quality of light in your space is incredibly important and while it takes some analysis and experimentation, your plants will thank you for it.

Start by identifying the light sources in your space. Most likely these will be vertical windows and doors but if you're really lucky, you may have a skylight or two that will provide some seriously good and consistent light for plants. It will also be important to assess how the light levels change in your space over the course of the day and from season to season. It's time to start thinking like a plant. It sounds a little kooky, but getting down to the level of your plants and seeing what they see is very useful.

It makes sense that the closer you get to the light sources in your space, the brighter the light. A sunny windowsill will provide the most intense light and will be best suited to sun-worshipping Cacti and Succulents. Direct sun coming in through a window may be too intense for some indoor foliage, so placement close to, but not directly exposed to, the rays is best. These plants will generally see the sky uninterrupted for most of the day which should provide plenty of bright, indirect light to help them thrive. The further you get from a light source, the lower the quality and quantity of the light becomes. Plants sitting on the opposite side of the room to the light source with no direct view to the sky will generally experience what we would consider 'low light' conditions.

To make a more accurate assessment of the light, a light meter is the tool you're looking for. Physical light meters can be quite expensive, so instead we recommend trying a light meter app which you can download straight to your smartphone and will suffice for most indoor gardeners. An even cheaper method is the shadow test, which requires nothing more than a piece of paper. On a sunny day place the piece of paper in the spot you would like to position your plant. Hold your hand around 30 cm (12 in) above the paper to reveal a shadow. A dark, clearly defined shadow with clean edges suggests bright light. If you can see a lighter, fuzzier shadow where you can still make out the shape of your hand, this would be medium light. If the shape of the hand is very poorly defined, you're looking at a low light situation.

> A thriving *Begonia* soaking up some gorgeous dappled light in the Amsterdam home of photographer Janneke Luursema (see more on page 196).

As mentioned, the light will change throughout the course of a day and as the seasons change. In winter and autumn, the sun sits lower in the sky and plants that were receiving adequate light in summer and spring can start to suffer. Be sure to stay on top of this changing light situation and adjust the position of your plants throughout the year. You may need to shift certain plants closer to light sources or sit them higher up on furniture or plant stands.

It can be quite disheartening to discover that your space is not as adequate for sustaining indoor plant life as you may have hoped. In these instances, grow lights can make a significant difference. The use of full spectrum LED lights, which produce a balance of cool and warm light replicating the natural solar spectrum, will allow you to successfully grow indoor plants in those darker spots. There's a range of lights and systems on the market but you can start by introducing some individual grow light bulbs in ordinary light fittings without the need for a full hydroponic set-up.

**Many of the plants that do well indoors hail from the tropics where they have adapted to growth in rainforests with dappled light, shaded by the tree canopy above.**



# water

ALONG WITH LIGHT, plants need water to survive and indoors they rely on us to appropriately meet their liquid needs. It is probably the area of plant maintenance that confuses and stresses new plant parents the most; no doubt you've heard how many plants have met an untimely death due to overwatering. However, with a greater understanding of the role water plays in sustaining plants, as well as the factors that can affect the rate at which a plant absorbs water, you will be better placed to water more effectively and avoid some of the pitfalls of over and underwatering your plant babies.

When an indoor plant is receiving the right amount of light and is potted in a mix that is adequately aerated, it will absorb water through its roots effectively, delivering nutrients and minerals to where they are needed most and filling out plant cells (along with cellulose) providing good structural support for stems and foliage. Overwatering essentially drowns your plant, as it stops oxygen from being able to reach the roots and puts your plant at risk of root rot (while underwatering will slowly starve your plant of the moisture and minerals it requires). When watering is inadequate a plant will often communicate distress either by dropping leaves or presenting with browning or yellowing foliage.

All plants require different levels of watering. It's impossible to say that a specific plant needs to be watered once a week or once a fortnight, as there are so many different variables. How big is the pot the plant sits in? A larger pot will generally dry out less quickly. Is the pot exposed to heat sources such as direct sunlight? Is it a little close to a heater, which will dry out the soil faster? Is the pot placed among a group of other plants? This proximity will increase humidity and keep your plant's soil moist for longer.

The absolute best way to test the moisture level of your plant's soil is to simply press your finger a few inches into the soil and feel how much has dried out. Do this every few days until you begin to understand its needs. Most (not all) tropical indoor plants like the first couple of centimetres (an inch or so) of soil to have dried out before watering again. Always check the specific water requirements your plant needs, and then be sure to adjust them according to the seasons (ie. water less often in winter when the soil is likely to dry out more slowly and plants tend to go through more dormant growing periods).

If you're not feeling super confident about your moisture-sensing abilities or have plants in awkward-to-reach places, a water meter will be your friend. Simply insert the prong into the soil and it will give you a clear reading of moisture levels, which you can then use to decide whether your plant is ready to water again.



When you are ready to water, give your plants a good soak. Ideally, all pots should have drainage holes and you want to provide enough water so that it runs freely out of the base of the pot each time. Empty the saucer about half an hour after you have watered to ensure the plant isn't sitting in stagnant water. Lukewarm water is best – too cold and it can shock your plant. Re-filling your watering can after you've finished watering means the next time you go to water you will have room-temperature water that has also had time to purify. Letting your tap water sit out for at least 24 hours allows chlorine and other harmful minerals to dissipate and makes it more friendly for your sensitive friends, such as Calathea and palms.

If you really want to treat your indoor plants, getting them outside when it's raining – or even collecting rainwater to water with inside – will give them a beautiful boost. This liquid gold is what they're used to drinking in the wild and is free from the chemicals and minerals found in our tap water that can build up in the soil. If you do take plants out to water, just be sure to bring them inside before it gets too cold or too hot. Sudden drops in temperature and direct sun on precious foliage can cause irreversible damage in a fairly short amount of time.

Jamie Song waters his Chinese money plant with a teapot. The narrow nozzle allows for accurate water delivery.





# soil

GOOD-QUALITY, WELL-SUITED potting mix is a crucial foundation that will nurture strong, healthy growth in your indoor jungle. Use the wrong potting mix, and you'll find that despite your best efforts when it comes to placement and watering, your plants will struggle to thrive.

There are four key elements to consider when it comes to potting mix: levels of moisture retention, aeration, drainage and nutrients. Potting mix is a combination of different ingredients which fulfil these requirements in different ways. Many of the more advanced indoor growers out there prefer to make up their own potting mix, customising ingredient ratios to suit specific plants. While this isn't totally necessary, there is something fun about getting your hands dirty mixing ingredients and is actually easier than it sounds because most tropical indoor plants require a very similar mix.

That said, it is perfectly acceptable to buy potting mix from your local hardware or gardening store. Be sure to select the highest-quality organic indoor potting mix. Store-bought potting mix generally has enough nutrients to support happy growth for about six to twelve months. After which point you'll need to start adding your own fertiliser (more on that in the following chapter).

Whether you use store-bought or make your own, you want your soil to be open, loose and nutrient rich. Play around with ratios, but generally for tropical plants you want a base of approximately 60 per cent of moisture-retaining material, 30 per cent aerating and draining material, and the final 10 per cent covering off nutrients. You'll need a greater portion of aerating and draining material for Succulents and Cacti as they prefer far less moist environments.

The term 'soil' can be a bit of a misnomer when it comes to indoor plants. Potting mixes are often soilless, so we'll break down some of the most common components used for growing mediums to demystify the dirt, in order to help you select, or mix, the best potting mix for your plant needs.

## MOISTURE RETENTION

The base of most indoor potting mixes consists of moisture-retaining material that is also generally well aerated and well draining. Potting mix needs to be able to absorb water to allow for moisture and nutrients to enter the plant system via its roots.

**Peat moss** Although a very popular product, the current rate of peat moss harvesting is unsustainable and contributing to long-term environmental damage. We highly recommend trying one of the two following materials.

**Coir peat** Also known as coconut coir, this is a great alternative to peat moss as it's a sustainable by-product of the coconut industry. Coir peat is a stable growing medium that is both lightweight and able to hold water well, and for this it is our go-to.

**Homemade compost** If you have the outdoor space, making your own compost is a brilliant way to reduce your own waste and give back to the environment. Properly decomposed compost is not only water retaining but a nutrient-dense treat for your plants.

## AERATION + DRAINAGE

Roots need to be able to take up oxygen and can only do so if there is adequate aeration in the potting mix. In nature, worms and other creatures help to ensure soil stays light and loose, but indoors, and with the added impact of overhead watering, soil can become compacted. To avoid this, it is essential that potting mix contains one of the following materials.

**Vermiculite** A mined mineral that expands into light brown particles when heated. It adds magnesium and calcium and has greater water-holding capacity than perlite.

**Perlite** A mined volcanic rock that expands when heated. It's a sterile material that's bigger than vermiculite and looks a bit like styrofoam.

**Pumice** Another volcanic rock and our personal pick. It's a bit heavier than perlite, meaning that it doesn't float to the top of your mix and fly away, but still offers the same aerating qualities. The pores of pumice also help store and slowly release nutrients and water.

**Sand** This is super beneficial when it comes to drainage and helps to mimic the desert-like environs of Succulents and Cacti.

## NUTRIENTS

Plants need nutrients to thrive. Most plants require fertilising every so often but ensuring there is some in your potting mix to begin with means your plants are given a kick start in life.

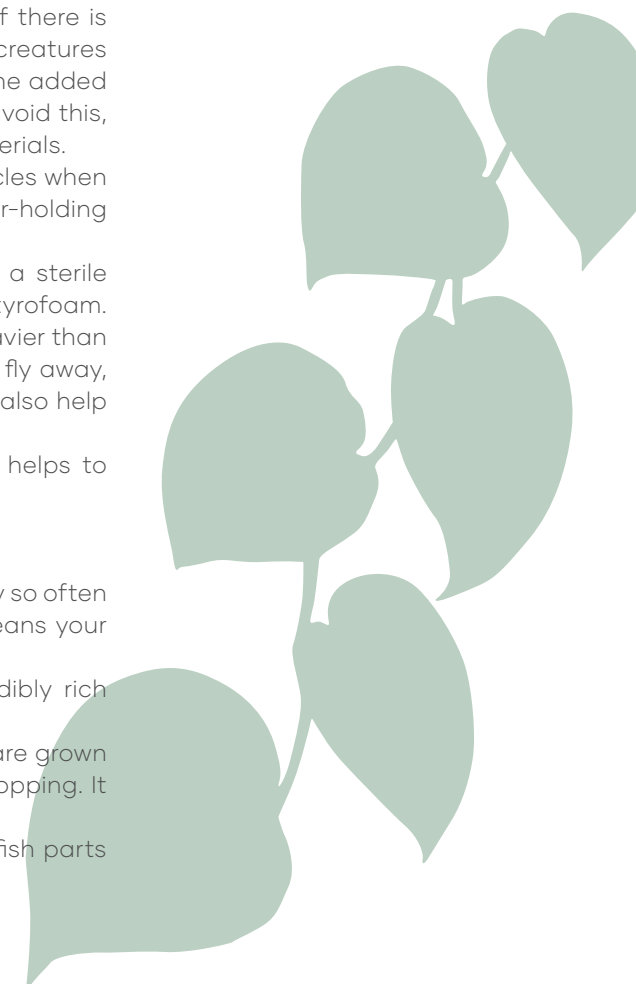
**Worm castings** This is effectively worm poop and is an incredibly rich source of nutrients for your plants

**Recycled mushroom compost** This is the compost mushrooms are grown in, which is then recycled once the mushrooms have finished cropping. It improves soil structure and releases nutrients slowly.

**Fish emulsion** Made up from what would otherwise be unused fish parts this is a gentle but still effective nutrient addition.

## plant hack

**Making your own potting mix allows to you create something that is customised to your needs (while still being suitable for your plants). A combination that supports greater moisture retention can help if you're a little forgetful when it comes to watering, or blend a well-draining mix if you're more of an overzealous waterer.**



# some other considerations

› Moisture-loving plants are great for bathrooms. Hardier ferns, such as Elkhorns, are well equipped to withstand the high temperatures from steamy showers.

YOU'VE GOT LIGHT, WATER AND SOIL sorted, so now there are a few other things to keep in mind while you're creating the perfect home for your plant friends.

**TEMPERATURE** In some senses, indoor plants are much more protected than their outdoor peers. They won't suffer from the damages of frost or hail but they are at the mercy of your heaters and air-conditioning units. Most indoor plants hail from tropical or subtropical climes and, as a general rule, prefer a daytime temperature of 15–24°C (60–75°F) with a drop of a few degrees overnight (3–5°C/5–10°F), which mimics its natural environment. Indoor plants will tolerate occasional summertime highs of up to 32°C (90°F), but will get stressed staying at this temperature for too long so do your best to lower the degrees during heatwaves and keep plants clear of heaters.

**HUMIDITY** Most tropical plants like things a little steamy. Air conditioning and dry air can really zap the moisture from your plants, so it's important to keep tabs on the moisture levels in the air. While Succulents and Cacti can deal with much drier conditions both above and below the surface, tropical plants' ideal situation is a relative humidity of 50 per cent. If it drops below 30 per cent, a plant's roots will struggle to absorb an adequate amount of water to keep up with the moisture loss through the leaves.

Grouping your plants together creates a microclimate that helps to boost humidity levels and makes misting all their leaves a cinch! Regular misting is a must for many tropical plants but is a relatively short-lived (and labour-intensive) solution. For something more longstanding, try using humidity trays where you place your plants on pebble- and water-filled saucers (the pebbles ensure the base of the pot isn't actually touching the water). If you're really getting desperate you can buy a humidifier which will have the added benefit of keeping your skin from drying out as well!

**FERTILISER** Plants in the wild have constant access to fresh nutrients, through composting plant matter and treats left by passing animals and insects. Indoors, a premium potting mix should contain enough fertiliser to keep your plants happy for about six months. But after this point you'll need to give your plants a helping hand. There are three main nutrients found in most fertilisers: nitrogen for chlorophyll and plant protein production, phosphorus for healthy root systems and potassium for disease resistance.

Generally, tropical indoor plants like to be fertilised every one to three months during the warmer growing periods. When things get a little quieter in winter, be sure to give your plant a rest. We use an organic liquid fertiliser and dilute it twice as much as suggested on the bottle so as to avoid scorching the delicate roots of our plants. It's always worth checking the specifics of each plant as some, such as pitcher plants or Staghorn and Elkhorn ferns, don't require much in the way of additional nutrients and probably only need a diluted fertiliser boost once a year.

