



## Indoor Gardening 101: Guidelines For Beginners

*Elevate your space with these easy tips and tricks from two professional florists.*

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Indoor gardening can seem like a daunting task to those without a green thumb, but it doesn't have to be. It's time to ditch the fake flowers by taking some important advice from two Chicago area florists. Jane Gallagher is a florist at [Southport Blooms](#) in the Lakeview neighborhood and has been there for more than 20 years. She says the most common problem she sees is people over-nurturing their plants and following the directions too closely.

“They move them around. They over water them,” said Gallagher. “People want gardening to be a strict set of directions, but it's not. There's guidelines you can follow, however, every home is different and there are different factors at play.”

If you've never gardened before, Gallagher says to start off with a Pothos or Philodendron house plant; both are from the same family and are very resistant to pests and can revive themselves even if you forget to water them for weeks. She says succulents have also been very popular for the last three years because they are easy to care for and require minimal maintenance.

"A lot of people actually overwater their succulents. Plants go dormant during the winter so you only need to water them every four to six weeks, and in the summer, with the higher humidity, every two to three weeks," said Gallagher.

Marc Waters is an established florist and has owned bunches (a flower shop) in Lincoln Park since 1978. He agrees that succulents are very trendy and has seen an increase in people housing these plants in either hanging or stationary terrariums to provide a modern design element around the house.

"They're extremely easy to maintain because a lot of moisture is retained in the container. They're very portable and don't grow very fast, so people don't feel intimidated by succulents," said Waters.

Waters also recommends orchids for beginners. He says orchids are typically labeled as difficult, but that's a common misconception. In fact, he says they're easy to care for, resistant, easily rebloom and come in several distinctive varieties.

Once you've decided on the types of plants, it's important to keep in mind some general guidelines for indoor gardening.

Overwatering is a big problem for beginner gardeners, but how do you know when you're doing it? Waters says a quick and easy test is to stick your finger in the soil at least an inch, and if the soil is moist, don't water it. Gallagher recommends lifting your plant periodically to gauge what it feels like when it's watered versus dry; if the plant is very light, it needs to be watered and vice versa. On average, an indoor plant should be watered every seven to ten days.

When transplanting house plants, it's okay to keep the plant in the plastic store pot for up to a year. If you care about the appearance, put the fully potted plant in a bigger pot and fill the space with a decorative Spanish Moss – a slender plant with tan, stringy stems – which can be found at most garden centers. Once the house plant has outgrown the pot, Gallagher says only increase the pot size by two inches in diameter and depth at a time. When it's time to transplant, water your plants first so the roots are wet. Then, add in two inches of soil to the bottom of the new pot before transferring your plant. Another trick Gallagher has up her sleeve is to use chopsticks to loosen up the roots of the house plant before potting. This increases circulation and allows the roots to expand into the new pot.

Another pro tip: once the weather starts warming up, it's extremely beneficial to give your indoor plants some time outdoors in partial sunlight.

“You never put an indoor plant directly outside in the sunlight -- even if they’re full sun plants, because just like us, they will get sunburnt and you could kill off all of the leaves very quickly,” said Gallagher.

With these tips in mind, any first-time gardener can pick up the hobby anxiety-free.

“I don’t think there’s any better therapy than playing in the soil in my mind. Gardening allows you to be creative and really de-stress. You just have to get started,” said Gallagher.

*Photo courtesy of Southport Blooms.*