

# CARE GUIDE:

## All About Air Plants



### The Basics

Air plants, or Tillandsia, are epiphytes. In nature, they will attach themselves to other plants - usually to tree branches - for physical support. They take nothing from the host plant, but get what they need from sunlight, moisture in the air, and organic matter that comes their way. Air plants are available in hundreds of varieties. Most have slender, triangular-shaped leaves, arranged in rosettes, and tubular or funnel-shaped flowers. It's no surprise that these fascinating little plants have

become quite popular as houseplants. While you won't need to pot them up, they do have specific water, light, and



Illustration by  
April Andruchow

temperature requirements. Following are helpful tips for care and enjoyment of air plants in your home.

## CARING Tillandsia FOR YOUR

**LIGHT** Give bright, filtered light April-October. Don't leave air plants in direct sun in summer months. Air plants love direct sun indoors from November-March, and may be grown in front of a window. Supply additional light with full-spectrum fluorescent lights 12 hours a day, if needed. Plants grown outdoors should get bright but filtered light, April-October (under a tree canopy or on a shaded patio, for instance). If moving plants outdoors for the summer, gradually acclimate them to increasing light levels.

**TEMPERATURE** For air plants, the optimal temperature is 60°F in winter, and up to 80°-90°F for the rest of the year.

**WATER** Thoroughly wet air plants, preferably with rain water or distilled water, 2-3 times a week (a light misting won't do). A spray bottle is helpful. You may need to water more often in a hot, dry area, and less in a humid, cool one. Plants should have enough

light and air circulation to dry in 4 hours or less after watering. If the plant is in a shell or something similar, be sure to empty any excess water. Air plants won't survive in standing water. If the natural concave curve of the leaves seems exaggerated, it could be a sign of too little water.

**FEEDING** To get maximum blooms, and baby air plants (pups), spray with Plantaflor USA Air Plant Food. Use at full or half strength, once per week, or even every other week. More frequent fertilizing is not necessary, and can kill an air plant.

**MOUNTING** Air plants can be attached to just about anything - driftwood, branches, seashells, coral, lava rock, crystals, etc. To hold plants in place, use a waterproof glue, such as E-6000 adhesive (found at craft stores). Larger plants can be supported with fishing line until the glue is dry.

Camouflage the adhesive with moss, sand, or sawdust. Mount your creation on a wall, fence, or tree branch, or hang from a ceiling or an arbor. It will make an interesting accent on a patio and porch, as well. Glue smaller plants to magnets and display on your refrigerator, or a magnet board.

**AERIUMS** An aerium is similar to a terrarium. Glass vessels are used to hold air plants, succulents, and/or cacti, along with decorative items. To make your own aerium, first select a vented glass container. Nearly anything you could use for a terrarium will work. Get creative and have fun - you can include natural items like moss, lichen, driftwood, pebbles, shells, stones, tumbled glass, or sand. Then add interest with miniature garden elements, such as tiny furniture, bird-baths, fairies, and gnomes, or some favorite mementos, such as collected rocks or shells. E-600 glue, mentioned in 'Mounting' above, will help keep everything in place.