

PRE-PURCHASE CHECKLIST

Inspect Before You Buy

Five quiet minutes with a plant in the shop saves months of trouble at home. Work top to bottom, and always turn the leaves over.

Head to toe

- Leaf tops: even color, no sticky sheen, no stippling
- Leaf undersides: no white fluff, bumps, webbing or moving dots
- Where leaf meets stem: clean, no cottony tufts
- Stems: firm, no soft dark base, no oozing
- New growth present and the same shape as old growth
- Symmetry: not leaning hard or bald on one side
- Soil: no sour smell, green crust, mold or gnats rising when tapped
- Pot: ask to slide it out; roots white or tan, not brown mush
- Roots not circling densely or pushing out the top
- Plant size sensible for the pot: not swimming, not bursting
- Other plants on the same bench look healthy too

Seller green flags

- Plants grouped by light needs, not by color
- Clean benches; saucers not full of standing water
- Some soil visibly dry: they let plants cycle
- Staff ask about your window before recommending
- Prices and names are honest (no 'rare' pothos)

Seller red flags

- Clouds of gnats; sticky floors under benches
- Everything freshly watered so nothing can be checked
- Plants in dark corners or by automatic doors
- Glued stones, painted succulents, cacti with glued straw flowers
- Yellow or dropped leaves swept under the tables

What you see and what it most likely means. Read the whole plant before deciding; one sign alone rarely settles it.

YOU SEE	MOST LIKELY	BUY IT?
White cottony bumps in leaf joints or on undersides	Mealybugs	Walk away
Small brown or tan bumps that scrape off with a nail	Scale insects	Walk away
Fine webbing at leaf tips; pale stippled speckling	Spider mites	Walk away
Sticky, shiny film on leaves or the shelf below	Honeydew from sap-sucking insects	Walk away
Tiny black flies lifting from the soil	Fungus gnats: soil kept too wet	Only if roots are firm
Brown spots with yellow halos, spreading	Usually fungal or bacterial leaf spot	Avoid
Crispy brown edges, otherwise healthy	Past dryness or low humidity	Fine, often
Yellow lower leaves, soil heavy and dark	Often overwatering and root stress	Check roots first
Soft, dark base of stem	Rot	Walk away
Sour smell, green algae crust, moldy surface	Chronically wet soil	Check roots first
One or two old leaves yellow, rest firm and green	Normal shedding	Fine
Roots circling tightly, water runs straight through	Root-bound; needs a repot soon	Fine, plan a repot

Why? Pests hide where it is dark and humid: undersides, leaf joints, the soil line. A plant that looks perfect from the top can still carry a colony home to the rest of your shelf.