

REFERENCE CHART

Houseplant Family Reference

Most houseplants belong to a handful of botanical families. Know the family and you already know most of what the plant will ask of you.

FAMILY	YOU KNOW THEM AS	ANCESTRAL HOME	WHAT ANCESTRY TELLS YOU	LIGHT	WATER BY SOIL FEEL	SOIL
Araceae (aroids)	Monstera, pothos, philodendron, peace lily, ZZ, anthurium	Tropical understory; many climb trees	Filtered light, warm, steady moisture but airy roots	Bright indirect	Water when the top third feels dry	Chunky: bark, perlite, coir
Asparagaceae	Snake plant, spider plant, dracaena, ponytail palm	Dry woodland edges and rocky grassland	Stores water; hates sitting wet; shrugs off neglect	Bright to moderate	Water only when fully dry through the pot	Gritty, fast-draining
Cactaceae	Cacti, Christmas cactus (a forest cactus)	Deserts; forest cacti from tree branches	Sun-lovers with shallow roots; rot before they wilt	Very bright / direct	Bone dry between; less in winter	Mineral-heavy, little organic
Crassulaceae	Jade, echeveria, kalanchoe, sedum	Arid slopes and cliffs	Fleshy leaves are the water tank; light drives compactness	Very bright	Fully dry, then soak	Cactus mix + extra grit
Asphodelaceae	Aloe, haworthia, gasteria	Southern African scrub	Tolerates shade better than cacti but still needs dry spells	Bright	Fully dry between	Gritty, well-drained
Ferns (Polypodiopsida)	Boston, maidenhair, bird's nest, staghorn	Damp forest floors and mossy trunks	Even moisture and humidity; roots hate drying out	Moderate, indirect	Keep evenly damp, never soggy	Peaty, moisture-holding
Arecaceae (palms)	Parlor, kentia, areca, majesty palm	Forest understory to bright wetlands	Deep roots, steady moisture, dislike being repotted	Bright indirect	Water when top inch or two is dry	Loamy with drainage
Orchidaceae	Moth orchid, dendrobium, oncidium	Tree branches in humid forests (epiphytes)	Roots need air and light; water then dry fast	Bright indirect	Soak when roots turn silvery	Bark, no soil
Marantaceae	Calathea, maranta (prayer plants), stromanthe	Deep, humid rainforest floor	Low light tolerance, high humidity, fussy about water quality	Moderate indirect	Lightly moist; never bone dry	Peat/coir, fine perlite
Moraceae	Fiddle leaf fig, rubber plant, weeping fig	Tropical forest canopy trees	Wants far more light than a room gives; sulks after moves	Bright, some direct	Top third dry, then deep	Well-drained loam

Why? A family shares an evolutionary strategy: how it stores water, how it handles shade, what its roots are built for. Care rules are just those strategies translated into a room.

Ranges are starting points. Your window, pot and season move the numbers; the soil check decides.