

# 5 easy-to-grow indoor flowering plants

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If you're a gardener and a mother, chances are you'll receive an indoor flowering plant for Mother's Day. The timing is good, because it doesn't take much effort to keep the flowers going through winter, and who knows what this winter will bring?

## What's to like?

Indoor flowers keep us cheerful and they liven up a room, making it feel much warmer! But there is more to it than that. Virginia Lohr, professor of horticulture of Washington State University, makes some interesting claims; that plants improve mental functioning in children, and reduce domestic violence, probably because of their known ability to reduce stress and calm us down. "In short," she says, "plants makes us better, more civil people."

## Be colour wise

Lighter-coloured flowers show up better indoors than deep reds and purples. Good mood boosters are plants with light pink, lavender or yellow flowers; they also tend to fit in with most decor.

### Try this

Use the rinse water from milk cartons or juice bottles to fertilise houseplants. The combination of nutrients from milk and juice provides a balance of important plant nutrients.

### Other tips

- Give flowering indoor plants pride of place, where they will be easily seen.
- Indoor plants don't like extremes of temperatures, so keep them away from heaters and next to windows because of the drop in night temperatures.
- Feed with a liquid fertiliser once a month to keep them flowering
- Plants need less water in winter. Feel the soil with your finger and water when the soil starts to feel dry.



**Cyclamens** are the indoor plants most associated with winter because they thrive in the cold and don't stop flowering. The hardest task will be to choose a plant from the huge variety of pink, red and purple shades, not to forget pure white. The latest trend is 'hand-painted' flowers that look like tulips, in various shades of pink.

**Where to put them:** Any cool room with good light, but no direct sunlight. A bright, south- or east-facing room is ideal, and even a north-facing room will do if it doesn't get too hot. They can be used as temporary table centrepieces in low-light areas.

**Care:** Keep the soil moist: they are likely to wilt if the soil dries out completely but will recover quickly after watering. Encourage new flowers by snipping off the old ones.





**Phalaenopsis orchids** are available almost all year round, but their natural season is winter, because they flower when temperatures drop and days are shorter. When buying an orchid, make sure there are still plenty of unopened buds, as this will give you more flowers for longer. The flowers are produced at the end of a long, arching stem. A new trend is to train two or more stems into different shapes.

**Where to put them:** Place them in any warm room with bright, indirect light: the bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, study, living room or shaded outdoor living area.

**Care:** Despite their movie-star looks, phalaenopsis orchids need no special care. Keep the plant in its see-through plastic container and in its special potting medium (bark chips). Once a week, run water through the pot for one minute to wet the potting mix thoroughly, or put two ice-cubes on top of the mix and let them melt. To improve humidity, place the pot on a tray of pebbles (to catch the run-off) but keep the bottom of the pot above water level.



**Calandivas** look like a kalanchoes (which they are) but have double flowers that are a lot showier. They re-flower throughout the year if old flowers are cut off. Put three plants together if you really want to make a splash.

**Where to put them:** Any place with bright, indirect light, close to a kitchen, bathroom or bedroom window, on a covered patio table or on a side table close to a window.

**Care:** Water deeply until the water comes out of the drainage holes, but don't let the plants stand in water. Let the soil become almost dry before watering. Feed with a liquid fertiliser once a month.



**Guzmania lingulata** is a tropical beauty that is a variety of bromeliad, and its exotic looks suit modern, minimalist decor. The 'flowers' are actually bracts that last for 2-3 months before the plant dies, leaving behind new plants.

**Where to put them:** Plants need medium indirect light (not sunlight) and a warm, humid room. Display on the coffee table or on occasional tables, in the dining room, the home office or warm guest bathroom.

**Care:** Plants are watered by filling the central cup – that's the space where the leaves meet and form a cup (or tank) toward the base of the plant. In winter fill the 'cup' with lukewarm water. Don't let plants get cold or dry in winter.



**Anthuriums** are used so often as houseplants that you may be forgiven if familiarity breeds contempt. But do yourself a favour and look again, especially at the less conventional colours: soft flamingo pink, salmon-pink with dark foliage, and pure white. There is nothing wrong with red either, especially the glossy red that's as shiny as a kid's new gumboots.

**Where to put them:** Anywhere that provides good light, is warm and not draughty. Being compact plants, they are easy to display and always have a bloom or two.

**Care:** Don't let the plants stand in water. The soil can dry out moderately between watering. Wipe the leaves to keep them glossy and snip off dead flowers.

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