GREEN MALL

Happy Plants, Beautiful Homes

A practical guide to plant & home garden care



Dinesh Chandra Rawat

Complimentary illustrated edition | English

A little care, every day

A garden becomes rewarding when you learn to notice small changes. This handbook helps you build that habit, whether you have three pots or an outdoor garden.

- Begin with light, water and drainage. These usually matter more than buying another product.
- Read the relevant page, try one sensible change, and observe the result before changing something else.
- Seasonal guidance is written with Kolkata and similar warm, humid places in mind. Adjust it to your own weather and plant species.



A useful habit
Keep this book handy. Good gardening begins with observation.

Find the right light

Choose a plant for the light your home actually receives. A bright-looking room can still be too dark several metres from a window.

- Watch the spot in the morning, at midday and in the afternoon. Note actual hours of direct sun.
- Bright indirect light means a well-lit position protected from strong direct rays. It does not mean a dark corner.
- Move shade-grown plants into stronger sunlight gradually. Sudden exposure can scorch leaves.
- Weak, stretched growth can suggest insufficient light; pale, scorched patches can suggest too much sun.

A useful habit
Photograph the same spot at different times before choosing plants.

Water by need, not by date

There is no single watering timetable for every plant. Heat, wind, pot size, soil and light all change how quickly a pot dries.

- For many leafy plants, feel a little below the surface and compare the pot’s weight before watering. Succulents usually need a longer dry interval.
- When water is needed, apply it slowly to the potting mix until some drains below. Empty the saucer after draining.
- A drooping plant may be dry or waterlogged. Check the root zone first; do not automatically add more water.
- Keep notes until you recognise each plant’s usual pattern.

> **A useful habit**
> A dry surface alone does not prove the whole pot is dry.

Let excess water escape

Roots need air as well as moisture. A beautiful container becomes a problem when water collects around the roots.

- Use planting pots with open drainage holes. If an outer decorative pot has no holes, remove the inner pot for watering and let it drain.
- Keep outlets clear of roots and debris. A stable pot stand can help prevent the base from sealing against the floor.
- Do not rely on a thick layer of stones to correct a poor potting mix or a pot without drainage.
- Check saucers after rain and watering. Keep walkways dry and avoid stagnant water.

A useful habit
Check the pot underneath as carefully as the plant above.

Build a healthy root zone

A useful potting mix holds some water while allowing air and excess water to move through. Different plants need different mixes.

- Choose a reliable, plant-appropriate mix. Dense ground soil alone often compacts badly in containers.
- Coir holds moisture; coarse bark and suitable mineral components can create air spaces. Mature compost supplies organic matter.
- Avoid fresh manure and uncomposted kitchen scraps in indoor pots. Use clean materials, and keep mixes away from food preparation areas.
- Cacti, orchids and acid-loving plants need particular attention; ask for a mix matched to the species.

A useful habit
There is no universal soil recipe for every plant and every balcony.

Repot with a purpose

Repot when roots are crowded, the mix has deteriorated, or the plant repeatedly dries too quickly. A single root at a drainage hole is not enough evidence on its own.

- For an ordinary small houseplant, choose the next sensible pot size rather than a very large container.
- Gently ease out the root ball. Loosen circling roots carefully; do not tear apart healthy roots unnecessarily.
- Keep the stem base at its previous depth. Add fresh suitable mix around the root ball without packing it hard.
- For most leafy plants, water in and let excess drain. Keep conditions gentle while the plant settles; succulent handling may differ.

> **A useful habit**
> Avoid combining repotting, heavy pruning and strong feeding at once.

Feed the growth you can see

Fertiliser supports growth; it cannot replace suitable light or repair waterlogged roots. More fertiliser is not a quicker cure.

- Choose a product suitable for the plant and follow its label for dilution, quantity and frequency.
- Feed mainly during active growth. Reduce or pause when growth slows, roots are unhealthy or the plant is stressed.
- Avoid concentrated feed on very dry roots. Check whether a new potting mix already contains fertiliser.
- Record what you applied and when. Do not layer several fertilisers because a plant has yellow leaves.

A useful habit
Diagnose first. Buy or apply a treatment second.

Prune, clean and support

Small, regular attention helps plants remain manageable and makes problems easier to spot.

- Remove dead leaves and spent flowers when appropriate. Use clean, sharp tools; clean them between affected plants.
- Before pruning a flowering shrub, learn whether it blooms on new or older growth. Incorrect timing can remove future flowers.
- Support climbers and tall stems with loose ties. Check ties as stems thicken.
- Wipe smooth dusty leaves gently with a damp cloth. Avoid oil, milk or cosmetic leaf-polishing mixtures.

A useful habit
For tree work, heavy branches or work at height, use a trained professional.

Make indoor plants comfortable

An indoor plant is still a living outdoor organism adapted to particular conditions. Its position must serve its needs as well as your décor.

- Place it where adequate natural light reaches the leaves. Low-light tolerance does not mean a plant can live without light.
- Keep it away from direct air-conditioner blasts and heat from appliances. Allow air to circulate without crowding the foliage.
- Inspect newly purchased plants separately for a couple of weeks before mixing them into your collection.
- Check plant identity and suitability where children or pets may chew leaves. Keep fertilisers and treatments securely stored.

A useful habit
Try a suitable window-side position before adding more plants to a dark room.

A balcony that works

Start with a small collection matched to your balcony’s sun, wind and available walking space.

- Choose stable pots and secure supports. Keep containers and hanging baskets safely inside the railing.
- Group plants with similar light and water needs. Leave enough space to reach each pot for inspection.
- Direct runoff safely and keep outlets accessible. Do not let watering create slippery floors or nuisance below.
- Before installing heavy terrace beds or large containers, have load capacity and waterproofing assessed by a qualified professional.

A useful habit
Measure the space and record sun hours before shopping.

Care for the outdoor garden

A good outdoor garden begins with the site: sun, drainage, soil, access and the eventual size of the plants.

- Watch where water remains after rain. Correct the underlying drainage problem before replacing plants that repeatedly fail there.
- Keep mulch around planting beds to moderate drying and discourage weeds, but leave a gap around trunks and stem bases.
- Water the root zone according to soil moisture and establishment stage. Newly planted specimens need closer checks than established ones.
- Leave room for mature growth. Avoid planting large trees where roots and branches will conflict with buildings or services.

> **A useful habit**
> Before requesting a garden plan, prepare photos, measurements and your main priorities.

Keep the lawn resilient

A green lawn depends on suitable grass, light, drainage and mowing. Fertiliser alone will not solve shade or compacted soil.

- Use sharp mower blades. As a general rule, remove no more than one-third of the leaf height in a single mowing.
- Match cutting height to the grass species. Avoid scalping, especially during hot or dry spells.
- Do not mow saturated ground. Investigate persistent bare patches, ponding and heavy foot traffic before reseeding or returfing.
- Water when the root zone needs it, accounting for rain. Establishing turf needs a different watering routine from an established lawn.

A useful habit
A smaller healthy lawn can be easier to maintain than grass in deep shade.

Summer: protect the roots

In Kolkata’s hot season, pots can dry rapidly, especially on exposed terraces. Check conditions more often rather than assuming every pot needs extra water.

- Inspect small and wind-exposed pots early. Water thirsty plants thoroughly, without leaving them standing in water.
- Shield heat-sensitive plants from harsh afternoon exposure. Introduce a change in light gradually where possible.
- Use suitable mulch on larger containers and beds, keeping it clear of stems. Check that water reaches the mix below it.
- Postpone unnecessary major root disturbance during severe heat. Support stressed plants with steadier conditions, not stronger fertiliser.

> **A useful habit**
> A midday wilt may be heat-related. Feel the soil before watering again.

Monsoon: drainage comes first

Rain can replace some watering, but sheltered pots may remain dry. Inspect each growing area instead of treating the whole garden alike.

- Clear pot outlets, terrace drains and gutters. Keep plants away from roof runoff that repeatedly floods their containers.
- Empty saucers and other water-holding items. Secure tall pots and supports before storms.
- Allow space between plants. Remove fallen diseased material and avoid keeping foliage persistently wet through extra spraying.
- If plants wilt in wet soil, pause watering and investigate drainage and roots. Do not add fertiliser as an immediate response.

> **A useful habit**
> Check the garden after heavy rain, even when you have not watered it.

Cooler months: adjust gently

Kolkata’s cooler season is not the same as a freezing northern winter. Some plants slow down while others grow or flower actively.

- Check soil before watering; slower-growing plants may use less. Sunny, windy positions can still dry quickly.
- Follow the plant’s actual growth when feeding. Do not apply a blanket “feed everything” or “stop everything” rule.
- Review light as the sun’s angle changes. Move plants only when the new position suits them.
- Keep tender plants protected from unusual cold and strong drafts. Plan pruning around the flowering cycle of each species.

A useful habit
Use the weather and the plant as your calendar.

Notice pests early

Look under leaves, along stems and around buds when you check your plants. Early action is usually simpler than treating a large infestation.

- White cottony clusters may be mealybugs; fine webbing and speckled leaves may indicate mites. Confirm the pest before treatment.
- Separate affected pots. Remove small infestations gently where practical and clean fallen debris.
- If a treatment is needed, use a product labelled for that pest and plant. Follow all directions, including any edible-crop harvest interval.
- Do not mix household detergents, oils or chemicals into an improvised spray. Avoid routine broad spraying that can harm beneficial insects.

> **A useful habit**
> Photograph the whole plant and a close-up before asking for advice.

What is your plant telling you?

A symptom is a clue, not a diagnosis. Check recent changes, soil moisture, light and the underside of leaves before acting.

- Yellow leaves + wet mix: check drainage and watering first; also consider normal ageing and other causes.
- Wilt + dry root ball: water slowly and let it drain. Wilt + wet mix: investigate roots; more water may worsen it.
- Brown edges: consider drying, heat, salts or root damage. Do not assume a nutrient deficiency.
- Few flowers: check light, season, pruning timing and feeding history. Weak stretched growth: review light.

A useful habit
Change one likely cause at a time and record the response.

Choose plants for the place

These are starting points for a conversation at the nursery, not a stock list or a guarantee that every variety will suit your home.

- Bright indirect light: consider pothos or a suitable aglaonema. Allow the mix to lose some moisture between waterings.
- Sunny outdoor space: consider hibiscus or bougainvillea where there is room. Flowering needs good light and species-appropriate care.
- Sunny kitchen garden: consider tulsi; mint needs closer moisture checks and is often easier to contain in its own pot.
- A sunny, well-drained spot: some succulents may suit it after acclimatisation. Protect rain-sensitive kinds from prolonged monsoon wetness.

> **A useful habit**
> Confirm the exact variety, mature size and child/pet suitability before buying.

Your weekly garden rhythm

Use this as a reminder to inspect, not an instruction to water or fertilise on a fixed day.

- Each day or as conditions require: check vulnerable pots, soil moisture, wilting and storm damage.
- Once a week: inspect leaf undersides, clear fallen material, empty saucers and check drainage and supports.
- Every few weeks: review new growth, light, feeding records and whether the collection still fits the space.
- At a seasonal change: reconsider rain exposure, watering frequency and the need for shade or wind protection.



A useful habit
Ten attentive minutes can reveal more than a rushed round of watering.

Before you go away

Test your holiday arrangement before leaving. A watering instruction should describe how to decide, not simply say “water everything daily”.

- Label plants with their names and basic needs. Separate drought-tolerant plants from those needing more regular moisture.
- Ask a helper to check the soil and drains. Show them the amount and method using the actual pots.
- Test any drip or wick system for several days. Check for leaks, overwatering and empty reservoirs.
- Keep a record of recent problems and a contact for help. Avoid last-minute repotting or heavy feeding.

> **A useful habit**
> Leave one clear set of instructions for everyone who cares for the plants.

Your plant-care record

Copy this page into a notebook, or print it for your most important plants. A short history makes advice much more useful.

- Plant name and variety: _____
- Location and direct sun hours: _____
- Pot size and drainage: _____
- Last watering and soil condition: _____
- Last feed / repotting: _____
- Problem noticed and date: _____
- Change made / result after observation: _____

A useful habit
Take a repeat photograph from the same angle to track progress.

Leaf spots: look closely



A real example of bacterial leaf spot on hibiscus.

Scot Nelson · CC0

What to notice Brown dead patches with yellow margins can occur with leaf disease. A similar-looking mark can also have other causes.

What to do Remove badly affected fallen material; reduce splashing and improve spacing. Seek identification if spots keep spreading.

> **Remember** The photograph is an example, not a diagnosis of every spotted leaf.

A white powder on leaves



Powdery mildew on a squash leaf.

Dmitry Brant · CC BY-SA 4.0

What to notice A spreading white, flour-like coating differs from separate cottony insects. Some plants also have natural pale markings.

What to do Give suitable light and airflow, avoid overcrowding, and remove badly affected material. Confirm the cause before choosing a treatment.

> **Remember** Do not assume every white patch is a pest or wash it with detergent.

Mealybugs: cottony clusters



Mealybugs on a rain-lily leaf.

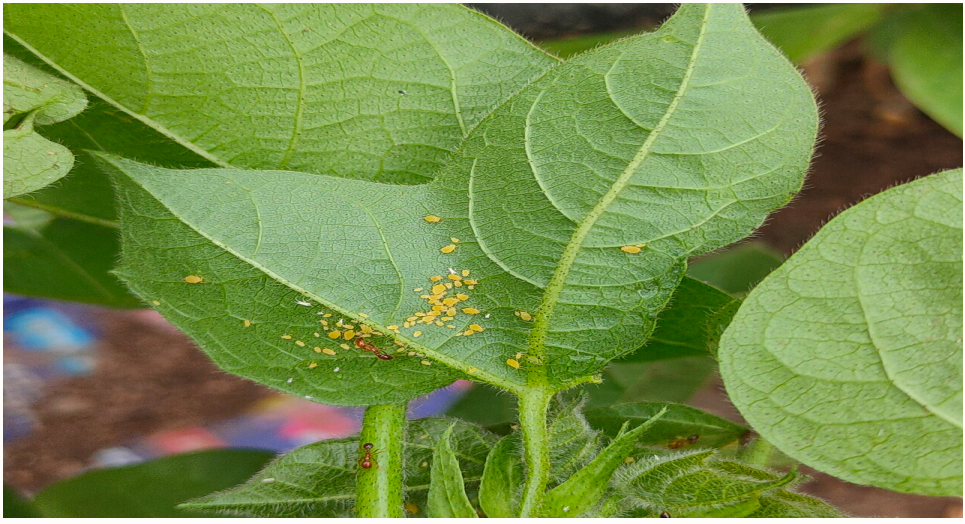
Alexey Iaa · CC BY-SA 4.0

What to notice Look for small wax-covered insects around leaf joints and protected crevices. Sticky residue may accompany an infestation.

What to do Separate the pot and inspect neighbouring plants. Gently remove small colonies where practical; recheck for newly appearing insects.

> **Remember** Check the identity first: some helpful insect larvae also look waxy.

Aphids on tender growth



Cotton aphids on a leaf, with an ant attending them.

Kirubar · CC BY-SA 4.0

What to notice Soft-bodied insects cluster on tender shoots and leaf undersides. New leaves may curl and become sticky.

What to do Inspect buds and nearby plants. A gentle water jet can dislodge small colonies on sturdy plants. Protect natural predators.

> **Remember** Ants can be a clue to honeydew-producing pests; they are not the same insect.

Mites: tiny but damaging



A greatly enlarged colony of spider mites.

Aleksey Gnilenkov · CC BY 2.0

What to notice Fine pale stippling and delicate webbing are warning signs. Spider mites are tiny arachnids, not insects.

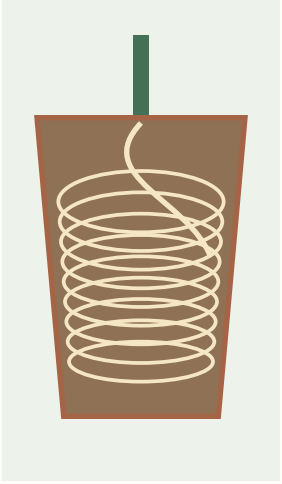
What to do Inspect leaf undersides with a hand lens. Isolate affected pots and confirm the cause before using a suitable labelled product.

> **Remember** Not every web belongs to a pest. Ordinary garden spiders are often helpful.

What roots can reveal



Firm & branching



Crowded & circling



Soft & collapsing

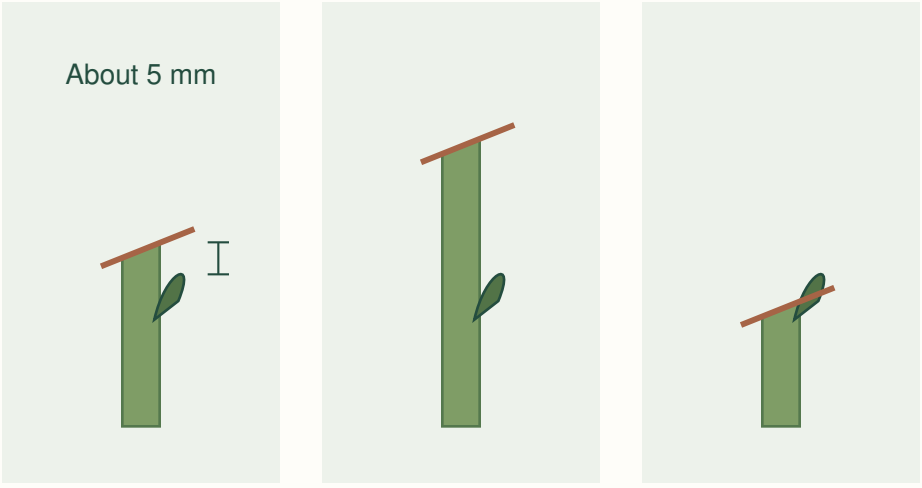
Simplified diagrams: root appearance varies between species.

What to notice Firm branching roots are encouraging. Dense circling roots suggest crowding. Soft, collapsing roots are more concerning than colour alone.

What to do Check the root ball gently only when needed. Match the next step to the problem: more space, better drainage, or specialist advice.

> **Remember** Do not cut away sound roots merely because they are brown.

Prune above the right bud



A small rose stem: an enlarged teaching diagram, not to scale.

What to notice Find a sound outward-facing bud. Make a clean cut just above it, with the slope falling away from the bud.

What to do Use clean, sharp secateurs and leave about 5 mm above the bud. Choose pruning time and severity for the rose type and local conditions.

> **Remember** This small-stem example is not a guide to removing large tree branches.

Keep the garden helpers



A ladybird larva: an example of a beneficial predator.

Bj.schoenmakers · CC0

What to notice Ladybird larvae can look very different from the familiar rounded adults. Many feed on aphids and other small pests.

What to do Pause before spraying an unfamiliar insect. Observe it, take a close photograph, and ask for identification if unsure.

> **Remember** Species differ. This photograph shows one example, not every local ladybird.

When to ask for help

Good photographs and a short history help the Green Mall team understand your problem. Start with photos rather than bringing an infested plant into the nursery.

- Take one picture of the whole plant and a close-up of both sides of an affected leaf.
- Tell us the plant name, locality, sun hours, watering routine and when the problem began.
- Seek advice for rapidly spreading damage, a collapsing plant, repeated root trouble or unsafe branches.
- For an outdoor garden enquiry, include approximate area, access, drainage concerns and the work you want done.

Discuss your garden with Green Mall

Plant and pest photos are real examples; their source links accompany the images. Root and pruning drawings are simplified. The decorative veranda and potting scenes are AI-generated, not photographs of Green Mall.

GREEN MALL

Let your garden grow with you.



Visit Green Mall for plants, pots and gardening supplies, or discuss your outdoor garden and landscaping needs. Bring a few photographs and tell the team what you would like to improve.

Explore Green Mall | GreenMall.in

A complimentary gift from Green Mall. No purchase is required to use this handbook.