



# Air Plant Care Instructions

This handout was prepared, in part, from the website of Tillandsia International, the largest air plant grower in North America. For more information about air plants and other bromeliads, visit their website at [www.airplant.com](http://www.airplant.com) or read about them in *The Complete Houseplant Survival Manual*. Tillandsias, a.k.a. air plants are epiphytes, which means they grow on trees (non-parasitically) instead of in the ground, and they derive moisture and nutrients from rain, air, and localized debris. The main cultural factors to keep in mind when growing them are light, water, and air circulation.

**LIGHT:** Bright but filtered light is the most important thing, especially from April to October. Do not leave air plants in direct sun during the summer months. From November through March, air plants love direct sun indoors and may be grown in the house in front of a window. If you want, you can supply additional light with full-spectrum fluorescent lights for 12 hours a day. When grown outdoors, light should be bright but filtered from April through October such as mounted under a tree canopy or on a shaded patio. When moving plants outdoors in summer, gradually accustom them to increasing light levels.

**WATER:** *Thoroughly* wet (not just lightly mist) your air plants 2-3 times a week, preferably with rain water or distilled water. A spray bottle is a handy way to do this. You may need to water more often in a hot, dry environment and less in a cool, humid one. After each watering, air plants should have enough light and air circulation that they dry in 4 hours or less. If the plant is sitting in a shell or seedpod or similar, be sure to empty the water out after watering. Air plants will not survive in standing water. If the natural concave curve of each leaf seems more exaggerated than usual, it may be a sign of underwatering.

**TEMPERATURE:** Optimum temperature range for air plants is 60°(winter) to 80°-90°F in spring, summer, and early fall.

**FERTILIZER:** For maximum bloom and for making more baby air plants (a.k.a. pups), spray plants with a solution of bromeliad fertilizer twice a month during spring and summer. That said, fertilizing that often is not essential for plant survival and overfertilizing can kill it. You could fertilize once a month or even less than that. You can also use other all-purpose liquid plant foods such as Miracle-Gro or your favorite orchid fertilizer at 1/4 to 1/2 strength if you don't have bromeliad fertilizer.

**MOUNTING:** Air plants can be mounted on almost anything: driftwood, branches, seashells, coral, lava rock, crystals, etc. using non-water soluble glue such as E-6000 adhesive which can be found at many craft stores. Larger plants may be supported with fishing line until the glue dries. Cover the adhesive area with camouflage such as sawdust, moss, or sand. Mount these compositions to a wall, fence, or tree branch, or hang them from the ceiling or an arbor. Use magnets to attach them to metal such as refrigerator doors or magnet boards.

**AERIUMS:** Aeriums are glass gardens similar to terrariums in which glass vessels are used to hold and display Tillandsias, a.k.a. air plants, along with other features or decorative items. To create an aerium, select a vented glass container. You can use just about any container that you would use for a terrarium as well a glass globes or cubes with openings. Compose a selection of items such as moss, lichen, driftwood, pebbles, shells, stones, tumbled glass, or sand to create a miniature tableau to your liking. This is an opportunity to get creative and have fun. You can even use miniature garden elements such as tiny garden furniture, birdbaths, fairies, gnomes, etc. that are used in "fairy" or miniature gardens or some of your favorite personal mementos such as collected rocks or shells.



Illustration by April Andruchow