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Common Ailments and Treatments for House Plants

Symptom	Diagnosis	Treatment
Black edges to leaves	Too much water in root system/soil; plant is too wet	Ensure water does not stand in a saucer and/or pot. Water should always be able to drain through the soil without accumulating. Ensure drainage holes are not blocked by roots. Add rocks, broken clay pot shards, or styrofoam "peanuts" below soil in undrained pots to leave room for water to collect away from the roots. If soil is properly draining, allow soil to dry more thoroughly between waterings and/or move plant to a warmer or more aerated area. Always empty saucers after watering or put gravel or pot risers in saucers to allow air space for evaporation.
Yellow leaves that dry and fall off	Not enough water in root system/soil; plant is too dry	Check root system to see if the plant is "rootbound" and needs a larger pot/more soil. Water more frequently, allowing only the top of the soil to dry between waterings. Move the plant to a slightly cooler or less aerated area. If a plant has recently been repotted, water the plant near its main stem so the original soil mass is watered more than the new loose soil.
Yellow or off-color leaves, especially on new growth	Not enough fertilizer	Add a slow-release fertilizer such as Osmocote every 4 to 5 months or water with a water-soluble fertilizer like Miracle Gro every 2 to 3 weeks. If citrus in winter, use MirAcid fertilizer.
Green veins showing in leaves	pH is out of balance	Call your county's agricultural extension office (Fayette County 257-5582). If citrus in winter, use MirAcid fertilizer.
Green leaves falling off	Not enough light or, in some cases, too much water	Move plant to area of higher or more direct light. Could occur during excessive clouds in winter. Add grow bulb to existing light fixture for part of day. Ensure soil is not too wet for the plant type.
White cottony spots on stems or leaf joints	Mealy bug	Apply a surface treatment (e.g., spray bugs with rubbing alcohol, a mixture of 2 Tablespoons dish soap per 1 gallon water, or a horticultural oil) when plant is not in direct sunlight. Apply a granular systemic insecticide containing imidicloprid and add just enough water to soak the granules into the soil. Reapply surface treatments every 2 to 3 weeks, systemic every 6 weeks until all bugs seem dry and flaky. Rubbing alcohol, oil or soap with Q-tips can be used to remove live or dead bugs.
Brown, black or green oval hard spots, especially on stems	Scale	Use same treatment as for mealy bugs.
Green or yellow bugs moving around growing tips	Aphids	Remove plant from direct sunlight and apply Orthene or soapy water mixture (2 Tablespoons dish soap per 1 gallon water) to surfaces of leaves, particularly around growing tips. Rinse of soapy water treatment after an hour. Plant can be returned to sunny area when treatment is dry.
Black flying insects	Fungus gnats	Treat soil surface and bugs with Pyrethrin spray or soapy water (2 Tablespoons dish soap per 1 gallon water). Be sure plant is not in moisture control soil such as Miracle Gro with Moisture control or similar. These are not appropriate for indoor use in year-round conditions.