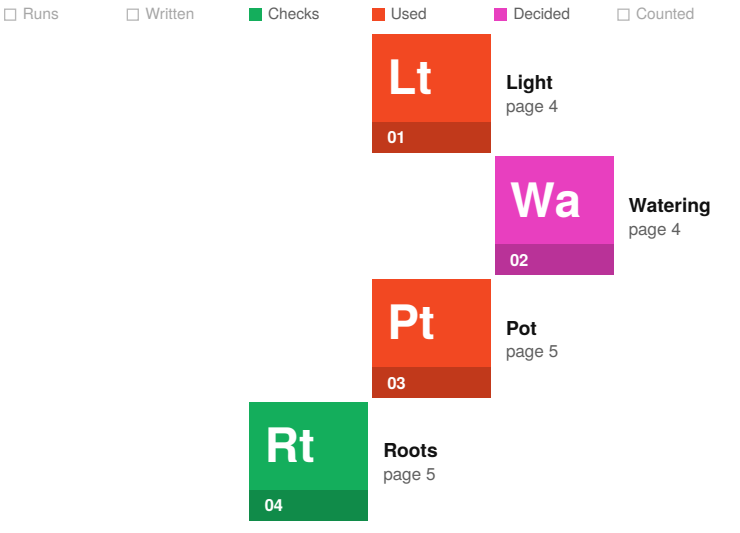
Is My Houseplant Dying?

A pocket-sized guide to light, watering and telling a thirsty plant from a drowning one.



My friend has a lot of questions.

friend@accidental.info · October 2026 · Version 0.5.0

Is my houseplant dying?

Your houseplant may not be dying at all. Wilting, yellow leaves and leaf drop are common signs of trouble, and many houseplants recover once their conditions improve. Watering is the most common problem, and light is what most often holds a plant back. Both can be fixed.

A drooping plant can be thirsty, with too little water, or drowning, with too much. The signs overlap, so check the soil before you reach for the watering can. If the soil is already wet, more water can make things worse.

Light	The sunlight or artificial light the plant uses to grow.
Watering	When you add water and how much you add.
Pot	The container that holds the plant and lets water drain.
Roots	The parts in the soil that take up water.

Thirsty or drowning?

Thirsty and drowning plants can both wilt, yellow and drop leaves. Look at several signs together, starting with the soil.

Sign	Thirsty	Drowning
Soil	Dry, may pull away from the sides	Wet or soggy, may smell sour
Leaves	Wilted, with crisp brown edges	Wilted or yellow, even in wet soil
First leaves to go	Often the lowest, oldest ones	Often old and new at once
Pot weight	Light	Heavy
Rt **Roots**	Light and firm, if healthy	Brown or black, and soft

Tip. Push a finger about an inch, or a few centimetres, into the soil. Water only when it feels dry at that depth. A dry pot also feels lighter.

Light

Lt
01

Identify by The nearest window and the plant's distance from it.

What **Light is what a plant uses to grow.** Light drops quickly as you move away from a window, and winter light is weaker.

So what **Too little light gives pale, weak, leaning growth, and too much leaves scorched patches.** In winter, move plants closer to a bright window.

Field marks

Check by	Healthy	Trouble
Window and distance.	**Full, even growth.**	**Pale or scorched.**

Confused with **Heat**
Light changes how a plant grows. Warmth changes how fast the soil dries.

Watering

Wa
02

Identify by How often you water and how long the soil stays wet.

What **Watering is when and how much you water.** The timing depends on the plant, light, room and season.

So what **When the top inch or so of soil is dry, water until it runs out of the bottom, then empty the saucer.** Cool rooms and slow growth need less.

Field marks

Check by	Healthy	Trouble
Soil an inch down.	**Moist, then drying.**	**Always wet or dry.**

Confused with **Misting**
Watering wets the soil around the roots. Misting wets only the leaves.

Pot

Pt
03

Identify by Holes in the bottom, a saucer or a decorative outer pot.

What **A pot holds the soil and roots.** A drainage hole lets extra water out, so air stays around the roots.

So what **Every pot needs a drainage hole, and gravel in the bottom doesn't replace one.** A pot left standing in water can drown its roots.

Field marks

Check by	Healthy	Trouble
The drainage hole.	**Water drains freely.**	**Standing water.**

Confused with **Decorative pot**
A plant pot has a drainage hole. A decorative outer pot can hide standing water, so tip it out after watering.

Roots

Rt
04

Identify by What you see when you slide the plant out of its pot.

What **Roots take up water, and they need air too.** In soil that stays wet, roots run short of air, rot and stop taking up water.

So what **Rotting roots make a plant wilt even in wet soil.** Cut out the rotten parts and repot the healthy sections.

Field marks

Check by	Healthy	Trouble
Colour and firmness.	**White or light, and firm.**	**Dark and soft.**

Confused with **Soil**
Soil holds the water. Roots take it up, so wet soil can still surround roots that can't drink.

Is it dead yet?

A plant with no leaves left can still have living stems, a firm base or healthy roots.

Check	Good sign	Bad sign
Scratch a woody stem low	Green or cream, and moist	Brown and brittle
Base of the stems	Firm and pale	Soft, hollow, black or smelly
Rt **Roots**	White or light, and firm	Dark and mushy, or brittle and hollow

If any part is alive, cut away the dead parts and repot the rest, or root a healthy cutting. If nothing firm or pale is left, it’s time to let it go.

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An Accidental Guide to…

Is My Houseplant Dying?

A pocket-sized guide to light, watering and telling a thirsty plant from a drowning one.
Written and reviewed by a person. AI does the grunt work. Set in TeX Gyre Heros and Newsreader.
Leave a star: accidental.info/star

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