



**ANDY'S AIR PLANTS**  
ACCESS THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF BROMELIADS

## **Air Plant Care Sheet**

Tillandsias are very versatile plants, they can be grown and displayed in many different ways and if their cultivation requirements are considered they will flourish, flower and produce clumps/pups. These requirements are:-

- **Light**
- **Water**
- **Air circulation**
- **Fertiliser**
- **Indoor cultivation**
- **Outdoor cultivation**
- **Pests and diseases**

The appearance of the species is often the best indicator of it's particular needs. For instance, the more silvery leaved species require, or will grow better in higher light levels. Species that are covered with fine hairs/scales or trichomes, giving them a soft hairy appearance, and species with fine leaves need good air movement or quick drying. In contrast species that are green or darker in colour, often with wider, shorter leaves and less or no visible trichomes hairs/scales require lower light levels, and will grow happily with less air movement in a more humid or mesic environment.

### **Light**

Generally Tillandsias grow best in the brightest conditions that you can give them. Especially the silver/grey leaved species, most of which will grow best in full sun, as long as the watering regime is upped to support this and they are not getting scorched, which can happen if growing them under glass. During the spring and summer dappled shade or half a day sun is fine, but plants can be gradually acclimatised into higher light levels especially the silver leaved species, the greener species are fine with dappled shade all year.

\*\*\*{include regularity of watering}

\*\*\*{ mention it is UK conditions}

### **Water**

Air plants can be misted, wetted i.e. run under the tap or dunked/submerged. Rain water is always best for your plants because it has more trace elements and nitrogen than tap water, but tap water can still be used and a small dose of fertilizer can be added. Tillandsia's do not like 'hard water' but 'soft' tap water is fine. I find the best time to water is in the morning, so that the plants can dry out during the day, also they cannot photosynthesis efficiently if they

are wet. Grey/silver leaved plants need to be drying out completely between waterings.

For many heavily trichomed, silver/ grey species such as *T. xerographica*, *tectorum* etc. light misting is best because of their tendency to rot if left wet for too long. When misting your plants if the air movement is good you should be thorough and give them a good soaking. In the right conditions your plant will be drying within a couple of hours. Many species should be mounted on their side so that excess water does not sit for too long in the centre of the plant.

In the UK climate, spring, summer and autumn is when your Tillandsia will be growing the most and so watering more often at these times is important for optimum growth. During these months and when the weather is good, Higher temperatures, sunny days and good air-movement I water my Tillandsia collection every day, I sometimes give them an extra misting in the afternoon as well. When the weather is cloudy or rainy and humidity levels are high I don't water them as often.

Generally, through the spring summer and autumn watering your plant 3 or 4 times a week and only once a week in the winter should suffice.

If the edges of your plants leaves start to curl inwards this can be a good indicator that your plant is not getting enough moisture and the watering regime can be upped.

### **Air circulation**

This is a very important factor for the health of your Tillandsias especially after the plants have been watered. Tillandsias live of the air and air movement is key to success with growing these plants.

Plants can be placed near windows or vents that can be opened when plants are watered, or if in a greenhouse or conservatory/porch you can use a small fan perhaps on a timer. If plants are placed outside they will have all the air-movement they need.

The finer leaved species and species that are silver and with many visible trichomes/hairs such as *T. tectorum* or *T. funkiana* need the best air-movement and the greener smoother leaved species such as *T. flabellata* or *T. cyanea* can handle less air-movement and a more humid environment.

### **Fertiliser**

During the year (not in the winter when light levels and temperatures are lower) I use a seaweed based product to feed my Tillandsia's. This is diluted at half the recommended dose into my spray bottle/mister and used with roughly every third watering which in the summer can be up to twice a week.

### **Indoor cultivation**

Tillandsia's are perfect for growing indoors, you should choose a bright window or room that has plenty of natural light, East, South or West facing positions are best for most species. Be careful to place your plants away from heaters like radiators as this dry heat can dehydrate your plant, also be careful that your plant is not getting scorched too much behind a glass window, although many species can handle very high temperatures they can

still be cooked especially if there is also a lack of air-movement. With indoor cultivation be careful also that your plant does not stay too wet for too long, you can always gently shake off excess moisture after watering, Tillandsia's are most likely to rot if water is left for too long in the centre of the rosette.

### **Outdoor cultivation**

Your Tillandsia will love being outside where it will get perfect air-movement and extra moisture from rain, humidity and evaporating dew in the mornings. If you are going away during the spring, summer or autumn it is also ideal to just place your plants outside where they can fend for themselves for months on end, even all year or until temperatures start to drop in the winter.

### **Pests and diseases**

Tillandsia's are generally pest and disease free. Occasionally they can be attacked by spider mites and mealybug insects.

Spider mites are very small and you will need a magnifying glass to see them but you may see small yellow patches on the leaves of your plant and very fine webbing between the leaves.

Mealybugs are small insects that you will be able to see in the leaf bases or in the centre of your plant, they are covered in a white cotton like substance.

The best way to be sure that your plants are pest free is by regular and close inspection of your plants. To do this you can inspect in-between the leaves and look down into the leaf bases and in the centre of the plant.

Giving your plant a good few hours submerged in water a few times a week with very thorough drying in between can often discourage these insects.

Also plants can be dabbed or wiped with a cotton bud soaked in a rubbing alcohol solution. Or non soap based insecticides can also be used successfully.