

# Tillandsia

**T**illandsia is a group (genus) of "airplants" or epiphytes in the Bromeliad family. These exotics come from Latin American where they are abundant on native flora, such as shrubs and trees or are found clinging to rocks and cliffs. They don't need soil because they absorb their water and nutrient requirements through their leaves.

With bright light and sufficient water, the plants are hardy perennials that will reward gardeners with durability, growth and brilliantly colored blooms. They also make excellent houseplants. Their life cycle is to grow from a vegetative offset, or pup, to maturity in 8 to 10 months. Then they stop growing leaves and put all their effort into the flowering cycle which lasts from a few weeks to a number of months. After blooming, the plants produce new offsets which then repeat the cycle. After just a few years, large clumps of these plants can be produced that are truly spectacular.

## CARE

As a general rule, submerge the plant in bottled drinking or rain water once a week for a few seconds, turn it upside down, and then put it back. Of course, the frequency of watering will be a function of the air temperature and level of humidity. Frequent misting can help increase the humidity. Although they are able to survive long waterless periods, tillandsias do like water. In fact, in a dry, hot environment (like areas of Novato, Danville, San Rafael and Central Marin), it is very difficult to over water them. Underwatering is usually the problem. A sure sign of a drying plant is if the leaf edges begin to curl up.

The easy remedy to cure dehydration is to soak the plant under water overnight. This soaking allows the leaves sufficient time and water availability to rehydrate completely. When kept indoors, this procedure should be followed every week or two. Outdoors, hosing when you water your other plants should be sufficient, but soak them if they begin to dehydrate.

## LIGHT

Grow the plants in bright, filtered light. Gray-leaved plants grown within 5-7 miles of the ocean can be grown in full sun. Most tillandisas will tolerate temperatures that approach freezing. They will also survive high temperatures as long as they receive a sufficient supply of water to make up for the increased rate at which water will evaporate (transpire) out of the plant.



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