



## Cultural Requirements of Anthuriums

Even though they are associated with Hawaii's tropical splendor, the *Anthurium* (*an-THOOR-e-um*) is NOT native to the islands. They are, however, native to the New World tropical regions where more than 800 species can be found from Mexico all the way down to northern Argentina and Uruguay. There are also some species that are native to the wet forests in the West Indies. First discovered in 1876 by Edouard Andre, a french botanist, these denizens of the tropical rainforests are at home perching on branches amidst the dense shade of multi-layered vegetation. It wasn't until 1889 that Samuel Damon first introduced *Anthurium andreaum*, a native to the wet forests on the slopes of the Andes (1200 to 3900 ft) from southwest Columbia to northwest Ecuador, to the islands of Hawai'i. Originally grown under trees in backyards, the recent years of cultivation and hybridization of these "plastic" flowers has become commercially profitable to the point where wholesale sales now exceed \$8 million a year. Almost 24,000,000 pieces are shipped worldwide every year with about 95% coming from the windward side of the Big Island of Hawai'i where the warm drizzly weather provides ideal growing conditions for the anthuriums.



Anthuriums, grown for their brightly colored flower spathes and ornamental leaves, come in a variety of colors, sizes and shapes. The shiny heart-shaped "flower" of an anthurium is really a spathe or waxy modified leaf that flares out from the base of the fleshy spike or spadix where the tiny real flowers grow with shiney dark green foliage. Anthurium plants are durable, relatively easy to grow and will survive as an indoor foliage plant for a remarkable period of time. With the proper care and environment, they can produce long lasting flowers all year round. Combine this with an attractive container to create a beautiful tropical addition to your home.

**Light** - Anthuriums as a rule (indoors) will take about as much light as you can provide them with – but not direct sunlight. Place plant in an area with good, bright, diffused light. Try to place the plant between 5 and 8 feet from a window. With a low light intensity, flower production will slow down or even cease. The foliage type species will tolerate lower light levels as they grow in some of the shadiest areas in their natural habitat. Leaves emerging under lower light may stretch and/or become distorted. Too much sun will bleach the centers of the leaves and may produce brown leaf tips.

**Temperature** – Anthuriums grow best with day temperatures of 78 to 90 F, and night temperatures of 70 to 75 F. Temperatures above 90 F may cause foliar burning, faded flower color, and reduced flower life. Night temperatures between 40 to 50 F can result in slow growth and yellowing of lower leaves. Anthuriums will not tolerate frost or freezing conditions. They do best in temperatures from 60 to 85 degrees. Keep your anthurium plant away from heat ducts, ventilator grills and drafts.

**Water & Humidity** – This houseplant requires low to medium amounts of water. Let the soil dry out in between watering. If you live in a hot area, water about once every 2 to 3 days; if you live in a rainy area, then water as necessary. Most importantly, the anthurium requires proper drainage. Anthurium roots should be moist but not soggy. Be sure your pot has drainage holes. You can also help the plant by putting 1-2 inches of pebble stone in the bottom of the pot. The anthurium requires a slightly higher level of humidity. So misting weekly will help the plant look and feel a lot better. While anthuriums are able to handle dryness around the root ball, they need to be watered thoroughly and allowed to dry slightly before watering again. Allowing the plant to dry out will greatly slow down the growth cycle. Drying out can also cause the tip to burn and root damage, while over watering can also cause root damage and sudden yellowing of leaves.

**Fertilizing** – After the arrival of your anthurium plant, apply monthly about 1 gram of complete fertilizer with minor

nutrients and organic supplements (Example: Foliar #62, Osmocote 14-14-14, or Plant Food). A quick word on nutrition. Most growers use a slow time release fertilizer on their plants. Fertilizing should not be an issue for quite a few months. If you are going to fertilize, use a light solution of a 3:1:2 ratio and it is probably best to dilute to ¼ strength. Feed with a slow release fertilizer as per instructions, or use a liquid plant food every second time you water your plant.

**Potting Media**– Anthuriums prefer a growing media that is coarse and well drained. The potting media should be of a peat moss base with a 1:1:1 ration of peat moss, pine bark and perlite. Plants, when they are young, should be planted in a mix that is not quite so coarse, to retain moisture. The soil should be settled firmly around the roots and the root system should fill the pot before the plant is stepped up to a larger pot size.

**Repotting** – Repot your plant early in the year, when new roots start to grow. Use a 6 to 7 inch (15-16.25 cm) pot filled half way with rocks. Anthuriums need a well-aerated, organic type potting mixture. A suitable soil media is 3 parts orchid peat, 1 part leaf mold and 1 part sphagnum moss, with a scattering of coarse sand, crushed charcoal and broken brick.

Each year roots are produced at a higher level on your Anthurium, which raises the whole plant high above the rim of the pot. Pack a layer of moss or peat around the bare stems, keep this moist, and the young roots will penetrate it, and the plant stem can be cut off level with the rim of your pot and repotted.

**Propagation** – Your plants can be propagated by dividing the stem with the roots in the spring and potting the separated pieces. Keep warm in an enclosed glass case with high humidity for a few weeks.

Seeds can also be sown, as soon as they have ripened, in shallow earthenware pans filled with chopped sphagnum moss, charcoal and sand. Scatter the seeds in the moss, cover the pan with a piece of glass or plastic and place in a warm propagating area.

**Pests and Disease** – Anthuriums are susceptible to the usual pests that visit other indoor plants, such as aphids, scales, mealybugs and thrips. Thrips and “mealy” are found more on new growth. You can also find aphids feeding on the flower buds. Scales seem to be particularly fond of the tough bird type. The best method of insect control is to monitor your plants and treat them before they get out of hand. There are some “insecticidal soaps” which work well on the soft insects, but scales may need a stronger insecticide. Under low humidity conditions spider mites may show up. One of the best ways to stay clear of the use of chemicals is with periodic wiping of the foliage and a gentle spray of water. Make sure not to forget the undersides.

Another common problem with blooming plants is they seem to attract gnats. Gnats, although they are no threat to your plants health, are the small black pesky flies that seem to fly up your nose and into your eyes! They like dark moist environments. The best way to avoid gnats is to keep your decorative containers cleaned out, and don't let the water sit in the bottom. If your plants are directly planted in the containers, let them dry to the touch between watering.

The biggest disease problem that you will face indoors is RHIZOCTINIA. This is caused by high temperature and humidity coupled with soil that is poorly drained. Don't over water and if you must replant, use a well drained soil, for that will be your best defense. Chemically, RHIZOCTINIA can be controlled with a wide range of fungicides. The best approach is prevention via cultural practices.

Overall, anthuriums are relatively easy to grow with attractive foliage that can produce long lasting flowers year round. With a little care and attention, you too will get to enjoy a touch of the tropics all year round in your home with a beautiful blooming anthurium plant.

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