

The Dirt

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Touch Base with Your Tillandsias *by Wendy Lagozzino*

You don't have to strike out with Tillandsias. These epiphytes stand out in many shapes, sizes and psychedelic colors. My local nursery tells me they are a big favorite of the people living in all the new developments in the area because they can grow indoors so easily. Display them creatively: glue a cluster of them to a piece of wood or a single one onto a small piece of driftwood, pop one in a teacup or hang them in various houseplants.

To properly water Tillandsias in winter, mist or rinse them in the sink once a week. In summer, up to 3 times a week depending upon the temperature, when you should use a ¼ strength solution of a high phosphorus fertilizer (high middle number) twice a month to promote blooming. Always let them dry out in between watering or you may hit a curve ball.

The best location to keep them is in a room with bright, filtered light. I had a cluster of them for many years playing hardball and refusing to bloom. I started experimenting with putting a small one outside in the summer hanging on a nail on my east-facing front porch. It received some early morning sun (on the days the sun came out.) Otherwise, it just got a good dose of bright light. This caused it to not only make an offshoot or pup, but also to bloom. A beautiful blue and pink spike with yellow stamens came out in the most iridescent shades. Now I realized what they needed to bloom, so I took on the rest of the team.



Sometime in May when the night temperatures stayed above freezing, I started getting my Tillandsias used to going outside for spring training. I put them in total shade on a covered porch for several weeks. Then I moved them into a rhododendron where they received partial filtered sunlight for several more weeks. Finally, I moved them to hang in the front of the rhododendron where they would receive full morning sun. They were very hardy and never showed any signs of burning. I could then easily spray them with the hose nozzle when I was out watering. No fair cheating on this schedule. If you steal second base and send them straight into too much sun, they will suffer.

Rhododendrons need something to jazz them up after they bloom anyway, and this was just the ticket. Folks really did a double-take when their eyes passed over the shrub and saw these weird looking sea creatures tucked into the perfectly designed nooks and crannies of the rhody.

In this bright morning sun, several of them developed a reddish cast to their gray furry leaves. I could see new growth on them and by the end of summer, one was grandstanding with a large flower spike. Before the first freeze of the fall, sometime in October, I moved them back into the house and hung them in my houseplants again. Several more are now developing pups and flower spikes. The home run will come when they slide into full flower for a welcome winter display. So step up to the plate and try putting a Tillandsia outside next year; you may feel like you've won the World Series.

Wendy has also written an article on plant fasciation posted on our website. Read it at

<http://www.mgfk.org/fasciation>.