Air Plants, which people also refer to as Air Ferns or Tillys, are called Tillandsia by plant experts. They are one of 730 species of evergreen—perennial flowering plants in the Bromeliaceae family. Native to the Southern United States, Central and South America, and the West Indies, air plants thrive in many types of environments. From forests and mountains to deserts and swamplands, Tillys do well just about anywhere.

Tillandsia are unique because their roots are only used to anchor themselves to other objects—mainly trees. Botanists call this kind of plant an epiphyte. Air Plants are not parasitic and do not require soil. They gather water and nutrients through structures in their leaves called Trichomes. These nutrients come in the form of microorganisms, decaying organic matter, and dust. Since the roots are not necessary for growth they are normally removed to improve their appearance.

Simply follow a few basic guidelines to provide natural conditions for your air plants, and you’ll keep them happy and healthy for years.

**TILLYS in the wild**

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**CARE instructions**

**Light**

Most Air Plants in the wild live under the canopy of other plants and prefer as much filtered sunlight as they can get. Indoors and close to a window is an ideal location. Artificial light is also a good option. Try to keep the plant as close to the artificial light source as possible. Air Plants do require a day/night cycle just like us, so cut the lights off when you go to bed.

**Water**

Air plants gather all of their nutrients from organic matter found in rain water and dust in the air. These microorganisms are removed from our tap water to make it safe for human consumption. Tap water will dampen your plant, but it won’t feed it. If possible, collect a bowl of rainwater, birdbath water, or pond water which has a high organic matter content. Even if you can’t see them, the microorganisms are there.
Air Plants prefer humidity above 50%, but this isn’t practical in most homes or offices. Fortunately, they are tank plants and can hold on to the water they collect for a few days. Broader leaf plants like Xerographica and Fasciculata can hold water longer and only need to be soaked weekly. Thin leaf plants like Argentea, cannot retain water as long and should be soaked twice a week and misted heavily every few days. The Ionantha and Scaposa are somewhere in the middle. A weekly soak and an occasional misting is ideal. Depending on your climate, this may vary slightly.

To soak, partially fill a bowl with the water you collected. Place the plants upside down with the base out of the water. After two hours, gently remove the plants and let the water drain on a towel for a couple hours. When misting, remove plants from any containers they may be in to avoid water collection in the container. Mist heavily until water runs off the plant, and place in an area with good air circulation to dry. As the plant absorbs water you will notice they turn a vibrant green. When they have taken in enough water the trichromes will close and stop absorbing. The silver sheen of the trichromes will come back as the plant dries. This is normal. The most important thing to remember is to let the plants dry completely between watering as they are susceptible to rot if left wet too long. Rot appears as a black or purple color creeping up from the base of the plant.

**Temperature**

Most Air Plants will thrive in temperatures between 50 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit. They will not survive an overnight frost.

**Bloom**

Most Air Plants only bloom once in their lifetime. The blooms are pretty spectacular. We’ve found that they really march to their own beat and bloom when they want to, but it is most common between winter and spring.

**Pups**

After the bloom the “mother plant” will slowly be on its way out as it focuses all of its energy into producing pups or offsets. Pups begin to appear at the base of the plant and look much like new leaves at first. After they reach about 1/3 the size of the mother plant the pups can be plucked off and survive just fine on their own. One mother plant can produce up to 12 pups.

**Fertilizing**

Fertilizing is not necessary to keep your plants alive, but it will spur growth and encourage bloom. We recommend lightly spraying them with a bromeliad specific mixture once a month after you soak or mist them. Fertilizing will fill in some of the nutrients your plant may be missing, but if you overdo it you will burn your plant.

### OTHER watering tips

Well water and softened water are high in Sodium. Using water with a high salt content will eventually kill the plant.

Distilled water has no nutritional value for Air Plants and will actually leach nutrients.

If a plant is in bloom, avoid wetting the flower. Water can cause it to disintegrate.

I can’t over emphasize the importance of letting the plant dry completely between watering.