



FAQ: Can I keep plants in my lab?

The answer depends on the applicable regulations. Generally, it is a best practice, not a requirement, that plants remain outside of the lab. **However, it is a requirement that plants be kept out of the lab if any of the following apply:**

1. The lab uses or possesses plant pathogens.
2. The lab uses or possesses insects (which act as vector systems). [Standard practices for Arthropod Containment Level 1](#) state materials unrelated to arthropod rearing and experimentation (e.g., plants, unused containers, clutter) that provide breeding sites and harborage must be minimized.
3. The lab has a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) import permit, which requires adherence to the Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories (BMBL) 6th Edition. Under the [CDC BMBL 6th ed.](#) (which is the standard of practice for biological laboratories), at biosafety level (BL) 1 and above it indicates “[a]nimals and plants not associated with the work being performed are not permitted in the laboratory.”
4. The lab has a US Department of Agriculture (USDA) permit that prohibits the presence of plants and/or which requires adherence to the BMBL.
5. Other institutional, local, state, or federal regulatory bodies or funding institutions have made it a requirement of the research, when not otherwise stipulated.

***If another PI lab group occupying the same physical space meets any of the criteria 1-5, then plants are prohibited for all PI lab groups in that physical space.**

**The [National Institute of Health \(NIH\) Guidelines](#) also prohibits plants not used in research, but only at BL3 and above, which is not applicable in most Harvard University laboratories.

*** For help determining if the above applies to your lab, please reach out to biosafety@harvard.edu.

