

## Moving Houseplants Inside for Winter

Summer vacation ended weeks ago for most, but for our houseplants, they are still enjoying warm days outside. Their leisurely afternoons of basking in the sun are coming to an end and they need to be brought inside. Bringing houseplants inside to overwinter extends their lives and gives you the enjoyment of plants year-round. Indoor plants reduce allergens and dust, make us more productive and attentive and help us feel mentally and physically healthier.

Plants are constantly sensing light, water, temperature, air and other elements around them. They need a gradual adjustment from the backyard to your windowsill. Proper transition techniques can help reduce their stress and enhance their appearance as you add them to your décor.

Generally speaking, for tropical plants you want to avoid nighttime temperatures of less than 50 degrees F and with other plants no less than 40 degrees F. When outdoor temperatures begin to drop, start the gradual move indoors. Plants prefer a slow transition so you'll want to plan a few weeks out from when you think these cold temperatures may set in. In Kansas especially, watch out for sudden freezes. If a freeze pops up unexpectedly, it's better to bring your plants in for the night than risk damage from a sudden hard frost.

Once you've established the timing to bringing your plants indoors, begin with a transition from sun to shade. Move your plants to a shadier part of your yard, deck or patio. This will begin to prepare the plant for the lower light conditions of your home. While in the shade, reduce water and fertilizer gradually. Your plant will always need watering but you'll find it will be much less in the shade and indoors than in the heat of the summer sun.

When you're ready to officially move your plant indoors, select a proper location. To maximize the light quantity coming in through your windows, clean the interior and exterior glass and avoid placing plants directly below heating or cooling vents. Any time you're purchasing plants for your home, it's easier to select plants for the light you have than to try to find light for the plants you purchased. For example, if you only have dim, low light coming in through all your windows, don't purchase a succulent and expect it to thrive. Rather, focus on low-light plants such as the ZZ palm or a philodendron. By selecting plants for the conditions you have in your home, you're setting yourself up for success.

Selecting which plants to bring in is just as important as preparing them for the move. Diseased or pest-infected plants may be better off in the trash. Bringing these plants indoors risks the health of all your other plants. Of the plants you select to move, remove any broken or dead branches but avoid pruning as this encourages new growth. Also look for rootbound plants that are in need of a larger pot. A plant is rootbound when you pull it from its pot and see lots of roots circling around the edge of the pot. If you pull a plant out and soil falls away from the roots with some root pieces showing but most hidden beneath the soil, the plant is not rootbound. Make sure to scrub the outside of all the pots, including the lip, for hitchhiking pests.

To avoid bringing insects into your home spray the foliage of the plants with a jet of water (with caution for more tender plants) and soak the pots in a bucket of warm water, up to the lip, for 15 minutes. This will drown or drive out any insects hiding in the soil. Make sure to allow all the excess water to drain from the soil.

Speaking of water, overwatering your houseplants is the best way to ensure they won't make it to next summer. Push your finger into the soil when you think it needs watering, a dry finger signals it's time to water but any dampness tells you to wait. When selecting houseplants to purchase, water is the second most important factor (light being first). To select a houseplant appropriate for your watering habits, you have to do some self-reflection. Are you a caring, empathetic person? If so, avoid purchasing a snake plant who will take your love (in the form of overwatering) as a sure sign for death. Are you a workaholic who sometimes forgets to feed the cat? If so, cacti can become your best friends! If you're unsure what type of water personality you have, select a plant that will tell you what it needs. Pothos are an excellent indicator of water. When they are thirsty their leaves will droop slightly. This indicates to you that it's time to water, taking the guesswork out of the task. For those with a compassionate heart, don't worry. As long as you respond to the plants hint, no long-term harm is done.

Although you can certainly buy new plants every spring, keeping houseplants over winter saves money, and improves the feel and health of your home. Plants increase oxygen that help us think and sleep and as repeated studies show, they just make us happy.

One houseplant question we receive ever year is how to get Christmas and Thanksgiving cacti to rebloom. Both of these plants require a temperature and light change to induce flowering. Temperatures of 50-55 degrees F will induce flowers regardless of day length (light) although flowering will be somewhat inconsistent. If temperatures dip below 50 degrees F, flowering will not occur. The optimal environment is nights longer than 12 hours (12 hours of darkness) with temperatures between 59-69 degrees F. Twenty-five nights with those conditions will initiate flowering. Fortunately, nature will provide these conditions in the fall. A plant receiving natural sunlight but no artificial light during night hours, will have this 25-day requirement met about October 20. It takes an additional 9-10 weeks for flowers to complete development and bloom. Both of these cacti like bright indirect light. Too much sun may cause leaves to turn yellow. Keep soil constantly moist but not waterlogged. These plants seem to flower best if kept a little pot bound. If you need to repot, try waiting until spring.