

Yard and Garden – 10-29-2011- Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

The headline read, *Move Your Houseplants Indoors*. With a big smile on my face, I thought I could send this to Jay Leno's *Tonight Show*; and, perhaps, he might air it on the segment called *Headlines*. After all, where is the logic? The very word houseplant implies the plant is already growing indoors.

Although I knew exactly what the writer was conveying by the headline, it still struck me as humorous. Gardeners know there is no such thing as a true houseplant. All plants naturally originate outdoors. When we humans choose to bring plants indoors, we call them houseplants. Some plants do exceptionally well growing indoors; while others perform poorly. Interestingly, those that do well are often commercially grown and marketed as houseplants.

With the recent killing frost, chances are very few plants you may have are still alive, growing outdoors and ready to be moved indoors. Hopefully, you took some precautionary measures to protect them.

Every year, when freezing temperatures arrive, I greet them with mixed emotions. I am definitely ready for a welcome break from gardening, but I am saddened to see those beautiful plants destroyed. Furthermore, the loss can be measured in dollars and cents. Acquiring container plantings of annuals and tropicals adds up financially. Keeping those plants alive for a longer period results in more value for one's money. The solution — make them houseplants.

A painful goodbye does not have to occur at the end of the gardening season. With a little planning, one can move plants indoors where they will survive until spring.

A couple weeks ago, Rita and I started transporting our favorite plants into the garage. Although not heated, there they survived the recent frosts. It is time we move them indoors. We have a room in our basement designed just for plants. The ceiling of that particular room is lined with an assortment of florescent light fixtures. All are on automatic timers, and when they turn on, I imagine our electrical meter spinning nearly out of control. Why do we do it, one might ask. Imagine this. When temperatures outdoors are sub-zero and the landscape is covered with snow, you will find me relaxing in the warmth of our plant room surrounded by green, flowering plants.

Move plants indoors slowly. Give them a transition period, time to adjust to their new environment. When plants are carried indoors abruptly, significant leaf drop usually occurs. The ideal indoor environment for plants to succeed is where there is abundant light, humid air and cooler temperatures. Unfortunately, these three requirements create a challenge for most homeowners. During the winter months, most homes are usually dark, the air is dry and room temperatures range from warm to hot. As a result, supplemental lighting is necessary as is a humidifier. I keep my supplemental fluorescent lighting on for a minimum of fourteen hours per day. Attempt to keep daytime temperatures in the sixties with evening temperatures ten degrees

cooler. Even if all three requirements are met, be prepared to see your plants struggle indoors. Survive versus thrive is the goal.

A few other useful tips to consider when moving plants indoors include the following:

- Watch for insect pests. It is best to treat plants for insect pests before moving them indoors. If pests persist, consider treating the potting soil with systemic granules. If pests become a major problem, isolate or destroy the plant before the problem spreads to other plants.
- Once indoors, prune the plant slightly; this helps to control size and encourage new growth
- Plants growing indoors require less water than they did when growing outdoors. Rather than water on a schedule, water only when needed.
- Avoid fertilizing when plants are moved indoors. Think of this indoor time as a rest period.

I am still debating whether to send the headline, *Move Your Houseplants Indoors*, to Jay Leno. Perhaps it is not as funny as I thought. However, I did move my favorite outdoor plants indoors, and I now have houseplants to enjoy all winter. I encourage you to do the same.

