

Yard and Garden – 10-12-2013- Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

Oh, it's a long, long time from May to December,
But the days grow short when you reach September.
When the autumn weather turns the leaves to flame,
One hasn't got time for the waiting game.

'September Song' by Kurt Weill - Lyrics by Maxwell Anderson

Before we begin our workday, Rita and I traditionally start our mornings sharing a cup of coffee and engaging in conversation. During the summer months, we spend that time on our deck enjoying the fresh early morning air and watching the sunrise. Of late, due to a chill in the autumn breeze, our morning chats occur in the living room by the fireplace. Recently, while sitting there, with soft music playing in the background, we listened to an instrumental version of the tune "September Song." I mentally sang the lyrics. When the song ended, I thought, "Wow, it's already October, and although from May to September may seem like a long, long time; for me it zipped by too quickly." As the days continue to grow shorter and the autumn weather turns the leaves to flame, the fact is I don't have time for the waiting game— waiting for frost that is.

Each year I greet autumn with mixed feelings. I am keenly aware that autumn can at any time quickly change to winter-like weather and deliver a killing frost. Although I look forward to a break from the physical toils of gardening, I hate to see the beauty of the past season's growth destroyed. With the threat of frost now looming, it's time I prepare certain outdoor potted plants to be carried indoors for the winter.

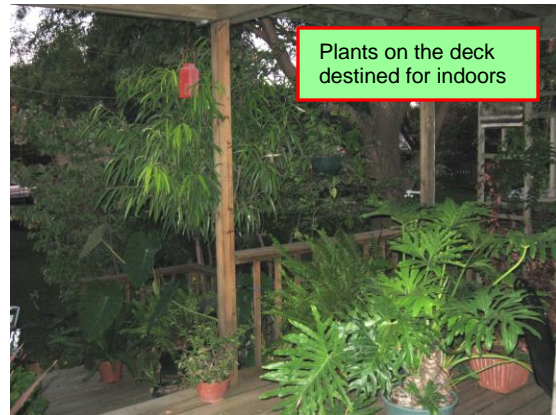
Rita and I have a number of potted plants that we've carried over year after year by transferring them indoors for the winter. These plants are generally classified as perennials in USDA hardiness zones higher than Zone 5. If left outdoors for the winter, they would surely perish. As simple as this task may sound, it's not as easy as picking up your potted posy and moving it indoors. A heated indoor winter environment is entirely different from that of an outdoor summer environment. I share with you a few tips for moving plants indoors for the winter.

First and foremost, plan ahead. Well before moving, determine an area in the home where the plants will receive bright light such as a southern window exposure or where supplemental lighting can be provided. The plants prefer a cool location, somewhere in the mid-60s during the day and a little cooler at night. Choose an area where water is readily accessible and a location where an occasional mess can be tolerated.

Before moving day, decide which plants go indoors. Give priority to healthy plants and those with the greatest sentimental value. If possible, acclimate plants to reduced lighting by placing them in a shady spot for a week or two before moving indoors.

Check for signs of unwanted guests. Insect pests, spider mites, snails and other hitchhikers could be lurking on the foliage or in the soil. Treat the plants with insecticidal soap or with other appropriate insecticides several days before carrying them indoors. If left unchecked, the pest problem will worsen indoors.

A good time to make the move is when outdoor temperatures regularly dip below 60° F. This past weekend's cold weather was certainly a wakeup call prompting me to get this project done and pronto. Since last Friday, October 4, we've been storing our plants in the garage at night and moving them back out to the deck during the day.



Before carrying them indoors, it is a good idea to cut back plants slightly to control their size. Pruning also encourages new growth that will be better adapted to life indoors.

Once indoors, think of the time as a rest period for plants. Plants moved indoors for the winter simply need to survive, not thrive. They will need less water and less fertilizer than they did when growing outdoors. Avoid over watering. Make sure the soil is dry to the touch before watering.

If all goes well, in about six months, after the danger of frost has passed, the plants can be once again moved outdoors.

I'd like to close with my new lyrics to the "September Song."

Oh it's a long, long time from October to May,
But by moving plants, you'll have saved the day.
When springtime returns, there'll be no one to blame,
For getting caught in the freezing game.

Lyrics by Ted Griess