

*Hub Article for 11-18-2017 by Ted Griess – Horticulture Assistant*

Only weeks ago, they were patio plants; now they are houseplants. I, like many other gardeners who live in northern temperate zones, am somewhat saddened to see the gardening season end. Watching one's favorite flowers and other plants succumb to freezing temperatures is disturbing. So how does one overcome this conundrum? Simple—continue the growing season indoors.



Perhaps you, like me, have carried a number of plants indoors to care for them through the winter months. If so, chances

are you have discovered caring for them is different. Although we now call them houseplants, keep in mind, the word houseplant is a misnomer, since all plants naturally grow outdoors. Even those plants advertised and sold exclusively as houseplants have that name simply because they do well growing in the home environment.

The fact is not all plants thrive in the home environment. Don't be too surprised if some plants carried indoors perform poorly, especially those plants that require long exposure to full sunlight and high humidity. My goal for the plants I carry indoors is simply to keep them alive. It is not necessary for them to thrive or to bloom. Should some reward me with those qualities, so much the better. Keeping plants alive indoors requires a few basic procedures.

First, one should only move healthy plants indoors. Those that were growing vigorously outdoors are the best choice. Avoid weak and sickly plants. If carried indoors, they are most likely doomed.

Carefully inspect and treat plants for any insect pests before moving them inside. Controlling insect infestations becomes an even greater challenge indoors. Use extreme caution when using insecticides indoors. Select only those labeled for indoor use and always follow label directions.

Lightly prune the plants before carrying them indoors. Because of the lower light, be prepared for significant leaf drop. This phenomenon is normal, and the shedding should taper off in three to four weeks.

Positioning the plant is crucial. Provide as much light as possible. Take advantage of a bright windowsill or be prepared to provide supplemental lighting. Since I place the majority of my plants in the basement, I use a number of florescent light fixtures operated by timing devices. Place the lights as close to the plants as possible and have them set for a minimum of sixteen hours per day.

Avoid overwatering! Too much water is the main cause of most houseplant problems. Although during the summer months outdoor plants may need watering on a daily basis, these same plants now indoors require much less water. Allow the soil surface to dry to the touch before watering. Water succulents even less often.

Attempt to maintain room temperatures in the 60° to 70° F range day and night and avoid drafts. If plants are placed near a window, avoid having the plants touch the glass. Other temperature problems for houseplants can arise by placing them too close to radiators or heating vents. These situations will create areas that are sometimes too hot, and will vary greatly as the heat source is turned on and off.

The humidity level in the average home during the winter months is like that of a desert. Most plants need a higher level of humidity to help them conserve water. Plants with thin leaves suffer most from low levels of humidity. Most plants will benefit from a daily misting or by standing the plants over trays filled with dampened gravel or stones. In addition, by placing the plants in mass arrangement, the humidity levels are raised.

With a certain amount of good luck and T.L.C. (Ted's Loving Care), my outdoor patio plants turned houseplants should have an excellent chance to survive the cold winter months and be ready to return to the outdoors next spring.