

Transitioning Houseplants from Outdoors to Indoors

It's that time of year again, when some of us find ourselves engaged in an annual ritual of preparing our houseplants for the haul back indoors. For most houseplants, this means ending their summer vacation when night temperatures fall below 45–48° F. Waiting beyond this time is flirting with disaster and you may find many tender tropical leaves dropping or getting a clear, murky surface, thus requiring your immediate attention.

As simple as this task may sound, it turns out that this is a project that requires some preparation and organizing. Follow these steps, to ensure a successful transition from outside to inside.

Have a Plan

Have an idea of what plants you plan to bring indoors and consider the vitality of the plant. If you have not had success with the growth of the plant outdoors, transporting it indoors where the humidity is low and the heat levels fluctuate may be a maintenance challenge for you. It can be a tough decision to make but you may need to consider putting your struggling plants in the compost pile. If your plant has grown to the point that it requires repotting, have potting resources ready well in advance. Use a high-quality potting soil and make certain there are drainage holes in the planter. One word of caution - avoid placing pots on carpeted and tiled areas without some saucers underneath them to capture the water.

Prep the Plants for the Move

Perform a visual check of the outside of each container to ensure you are not transporting any moss, mold, or unwanted pests such as spider mites, mealy bugs, or white flies. You must commit to making certain your containers are free and clear of hitchhikers lurking in and around your pots. Using a whisk broom is quite effective.

When cleaning the outside of each container, use an effective solution that includes 1-part bleach to 3-parts water and scrub them with a soft brush or

sponge. If you discover any bugs, consider repotting the plant to avoid bringing them inside and having their eggs hatch. Remove any dead foliage or yellowing leaves and give any plants a neat trimming. For most tropicals with tender leaves, use a water hose and set the spray setting from “jet” to “shower.” Allow the plants to air dry for about 2 hours before spraying the foliage with an insecticidal soap.

Prepare the Area Indoors

Determine where you want to locate each of the plants. Find the right place for the right plant. If they require full sun, consider placing them in a southern location. Otherwise, place plants that require low to partial shade in an eastern or western location. If you do not have the option of placing them in any of these locations, consider purchasing lighting specifically designed for plants. Avoid placing your plants near heating vents or areas that get drafts from doors. Consider installing plant ceiling hooks or tall planters for ferns. It's also a good idea to consider grouping your plants together and sit them on non-porous gravel trays that help increase humidity. Keep just enough water below the gravel layer as a supplemental humidifier for them. After you have brought your plants indoors, keep your eyes open for any signs of the “hitchhikers” that may have found their way inside.

Avoid Transplant Shock

Because lighting in most homes is less than many plants receive outdoors, try to gradually move them to lower light levels outdoors in stages before bringing indoors. This will help minimize transplant shock. Transplant shock usually shows up as yellowing and dropping of leaves. Once the plant adjusts to the indoor light, it will gradually replace some of the leaves it previously lost.

Don't Over Water

Your potted plants will not dry out nearly as fast indoors as they did in the summer heat and high winds. Plants do grow more slowly indoors than they did under stronger light conditions. Therefore, they do not need as much water in the house as they did outside. Make sure the soil is dry to the touch before watering again. You can even use a chopstick or pencil and stick it in the soil. If it comes out dry, moisten the soil.

Fertilize

You may not need to fertilize but, if you decide to, follow the instructions on the package. It's even a good idea to cut the recommended amount in half for indoor fertilization. To avoid fertilizer shock, try fertilizing with worm castings. You can purchase them at your local nursery. Water the castings into the potting mix before bringing the plants inside to avoid a mess.

In just a few months, you can consider moving your plants back outside, after any danger of frost has passed in the spring and overnight temperatures hover in the 60s.