

Preparing Plants for 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 needs some organizing. Follow these steps, to ensure a successful transition from outside to inside.

1. Have a Plan

Have an idea of what plants you plan to bring indoors and consider the vitality of the plant. If you haven't had success with the growth of the plant outdoors, transporting it indoors where the humidity is low and the heat levels are dry may be a maintenance challenge for you. It can be a tough decision to make, but you may need to just put 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.

2. Prep the Plants for the Move

Check the outside of the pots to ensure you're not transporting any moss, mold or unwanted bugs such as spider mites, mealy bus or white flies. You must make certain your pots are free and clear of hitchhikers lurking in and around your pots.

When cleaning the outside of your pots, use an effective solution that includes 1-part bleach to 3-parts water and scrub them with a soft brush. If you discover any bugs, consider repotting the plant so you avoid bringing them inside and having their eggs hatch.

Remove any dead foliage or yellowing leaves and prune any plants that need it. Use a water hose to spray the plants and let them air dry for about 2 hours before spraying the foliage with an insecticidal soap.

3. Prepare the Area Indoors

Determine where you want to locate each of the plants you bring indoors. 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

don't 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 and install 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. After you've brought your plants indoors, keep your eyes open for any signs of the "hitchhikers" that may have found their way inside.

4. Avoid Transplant Shock

Because lighting in most homes is less than many plants receive outdoors, try to gradually move them to lower light levels in stages. 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.

5. Don't Over Water

Your potted plants won't 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 strong light conditions. Therefore, they don't need as much water in the house as they did outside. Make sure the soil is dry to the touch before watering. Use a chopstick or pencil and stick it in the soil. If it comes out dry, moisten the soil.

6. Fertilize

You may not need to fertilize but, if you decide to, follow the instructions on the package. 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 evening temperatures hover in the 60s.