

Bringing Houseplants Indoors

Autumn has arrived to Northeast Ohio where bright, sunny days slowly turn to cool breezy nights and landscape colors begin to change into vivid hues of yellow, orange, red and purple. There is plenty to do outdoors in the garden, harvesting, planting bulbs, and especially fall clean-up. Meanwhile, take the time to plan how to bring your tropical and tender houseplants indoors for their best survival.

Most tropical houseplants can tolerate temperatures as low as 45 degrees F, so you do not need to worry about taking them indoors immediately on the fall equinox! What works best is to expose them to the cooling temperatures of autumn, including 1 or 2 light fall frosts so that their growth processes will naturally slow down. The shortening days and lower light levels of fall have already triggered this "resting" response which will help the houseplants survive better indoors over winter.

Once your houseplants have experienced 1-2 light frosts, usually occurring by October 5th, bring them into the garage, under a shade tree or an overhang so they are protected from additional fall frosts and will start acclimating themselves to the lower light levels indoors. The key is to slow down growth, have them experience a gradual reintroduction inside, and not to damage the foliage in the cold. Remember to clean your windows for optimum sun exposure inside too!

As outdoor temperatures drop below 40 degrees F and you are tempted to turn the furnace on at night, it is time to bring the plants indoors. Before you do, inspect the outside of the pot, the potting soil, foliage and/or flowers. Remove any infested, dead or damaged plant material and lightly prune to shape the plant to a manageable size if necessary. It is best to postpone any heavy pruning until early spring as the tropical plant starts actively growing again.

Rinse-off any debris or insects with a cold stream of water from the garden hose. Apply Bonide Systemic Houseplant Insect Control to eliminate pests in the potting soil. Liberally spray the houseplants with an insecticidal soap for added insurance. Once the foliage dries bring the plants indoors into their winter home. Be sure to avoid hot and cold drafts and try to provide as much indirect light appropriate for your plants.

Over winter stick to a morning watering schedule where the potting soil stays on the drier side of watering. Thoroughly saturate the plant's soil letting the water drain into a gravel lined drip tray, repeat. Reapply water in a week or more when the soil surface feels dry one knuckle deep. It is better to have dry soil to the point of wilting rather than too wet where roots drown. Plants can recover more quickly from drought stress, but rarely recuperate from root rot. Increased humidity is beneficial and can be achieved by spray misting or setting the houseplants on moistened gravel trays. Remember the lower the temperature and light levels in your home along with higher humidity the less watering you will need to do.

There is no need to fertilize your tropical plants until spring unless you are trying to maintain a heavy feeding, flowering plant like African violets. Other flowering tropicals like Mandevilla, Hibiscus and Oleander perform better next year if well rested with no fertilizer until spring.

rev 9/09