

Growing Gardenias

Gardenia jasminoides or Cape Jasmine is one of the most enticing tropical, houseplants with glossy green foliage, compact habit, and irresistible, fragrant, waxy-white flowers. However, all of their beauty and reward comes with a price, being one of the most difficult tropical plants to grow and maintain. If you have attention for detail and can accommodate the following maintenance requirements, you should be successful growing Gardenias.

First consider sun exposure with Gardenias, flourishing in part-shade with 4-6 hours of direct sun per day, morning sun (eastern exposure) being the best. They can be grown outdoors in part-shade after the last spring frost on porches, patios, in pots or in the landscape, and returned indoors before fall frosts begin to a bright room or eastern window. Of course, growing them indoors year round is easier to control temperatures.

Temperatures should reach no higher than 80 degrees F, preferring 70 degrees during the day with 60 degrees at night. This nighttime temperature is crucial needing to be at least 10 degrees lower from daytime temperatures and no warmer than 62°F to set buds. One warm night can prevent buds from forming.

Gardenias need consistent watering maintenance. Humidity supplied by daily spray misting or setting the plant on a drip tray filled with pebbles and an inch of water to evaporate will help. In watering, the soil should be thoroughly moistened with tepid water, let it drain freely from the pot, then repeat. Water again when the soil feels slightly dry to the touch. Do not let the root base dry out; the plant will typically not bounce back. Too much or too little water, dry air, cold or hot drafts, or too many dark winter days can cause bud drop.

Feed with Osmocote for acid loving plants (purple cap) following directions on the label, or try a liquid, acidic plant food like Miracid once a month April-September. Repot in spring, only when roots have completely filled the pot using a 1:1 ratio of all purpose potting soil and peat moss. Control insects with insecticidal soap sprays, dabbing them with rubbing alcohol, or using a horticultural oil spray.

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