



Overwintering Houseplants & Tropicals

Overwintering houseplants and tropicals requires giving them what they need to survive: water & humidity, light & cleanliness, no diseases or insects, and time to rest.

Water & Humidity

Predicting plant hydration needs is a bit like predicting the weather. Indoor conditions change with the seasons. The heat running more on cold days, fans moving, a stretch of cloudy vs sunny days, or more humid conditions in rooms like the bathroom and kitchen will affect how quickly plants dry out. Most houseplants can be watered weekly. Cacti and succulents should be watered every three to four weeks. Before watering, check to see if the soil is moist by touching it with your finger. Most often, you should let the top inch dry out before watering again. It may take a few weeks to learn exactly what each plant needs in your specific environment. Using a humidity tray can be helpful for plants that are more susceptible to the dry conditions created by winter heating.

Light & Cleanliness

Short winter days and new windows with UV protection create lower indoor light conditions. Be sure plants receive the proper amount of light and keep leaves wiped clean. Dust settled on leaves can also affect light levels. Additional light from plant lights or fluorescent lights can be helpful. 16 hours of lamp light followed by 8 hours of dark is recommended. Automatic timers can simplify the on/off cycle. Always turn or rotate your plants periodically to face the strongest light source so they will grow evenly and don't stretch.

Diseases & Insects

When watering, always inspect plants for signs of insects and diseases as early treatment is most effective. Remove damaged leaves, rinse or wipe off insects, or apply appropriate insecticides for indoor use. Keeping soil overly wet can encourage fungus gnats. Proper watering can go a long way in avoiding these soil born pests.

Time to Rest

The shorter days of winter signal a slowdown in the growth cycle of most houseplants and tropicals. Because of this natural pattern, winter is not the best time to repot, divide, or even fertilize. Only in unavoidable situations should plants be disturbed at this time. Using the equinoxes as a marker to start and stop fertilization is a good reminder tool. In mid-March, near the spring equinox, the days grow longer and plants begin an active growth period in which fertilization, repotting, and dividing is best accomplished. This continues through the autumn equinox in September.

From the Garden

Some summer annual bulbs and flowers such as caladiums, elephant ears, geraniums, and dahlias can simply be stored completely dormant indoors in a cool dark place and brought back to life next spring.

Houseplants beautify the home and are also good for the psyche as well as the environment by cleaning the air. Take care of them and they will take care of you all winter long. Protect them from drafts and cold, but most of all take time to learn more about the specific plants you are caring for to help them not only survive, but thrive indoors.