

BRINGING PLANTS INDOORS FOR THE WINTER

Researched by Parker County Master Gardener La Donna Stockstill

The first thing to do is to move your tropical or non-hardy plants into a shady location outside, and leave them there for ten days to two weeks. This helps to acclimate them to the lower light conditions they will be receiving once inside your home. Do this with the first frost/freeze date estimated to be November 12th in our area. Also remember, there are some tropicals that suffer when the temperature drops below 50-degrees and the wind creates a chill. When acclimating your plants, put them in an area that will not receive the high chilling winds we sometimes experience.

Just before bringing them inside there are at least three things to do:

Hose them off with a strong stream of water but be careful, do not use too strong of a stream because you can damage your prized plants. You may even want to do this a couple times while they are acclimating in the shade. This helps blow off any insects that may be hanging out on the plants. Immediately before bringing them inside, you may want to give them a good spraying of insecticidal soap, making sure you spray tops and bottoms of the leaves as well as the stems and trunks and the top of the soil. Let them completely dry before bringing them indoors. You can also dab rubbing alcohol on the insects you may see; a cotton swab works well for this purpose. The last thing to do is, if possible, lay the plant on its side, slide it out of the pot and inspect the root ball for any unwanted bugs or anything else that may be hiding in the bottom of the pot. Rodents, even snakes have been found hiding there. One way to make sure nothing is in the soil (ants, roaches, etc) is to fill a large tub with water, then submerge the pot into the water for several hours. Anything in the soil will either drown, or will float to the top of the water. This is also a great way to soak the soil. Just make sure you allow it plenty of time to drain before bringing it into the house. You will also want to clean the outside of the pot to remove any debris.

Having done all of the above you are ready to move your tropical plants indoors to a well-lit area, and away from heat vents and cold drafts. Place a saucer under the pot. You also may want to use pot feet or other methods to keep the plants in their saucers off your carpet or other flooring. When watering, a rule of thumb is to water the plants well, let them slightly dry before watering again. You know your plants and their water requirements but remember these rules can change when the plants are indoors. The lack of humidity in the home may require an occasional misting of your plants with plain water. Here again, you know your plants and know which ones will benefit from this misting. Never let water sit in the saucer and use lukewarm water for watering or misting.

Because it is natural, expect leaves to drop as the plants make their final acclimation to the indoor lighting. Keep an eye out for any insects on the plants and keep insecticidal soaps, systemic insecticides and whitefly traps on hand just in case.

Reduce feeding to an occasional use of water-soluble fertilizer, which can be increased once the days start to get longer, next spring.