

Bringing Houseplants Back Indoors

It's time to bring houseplants back indoors that have spent the summer outside. Once night temperatures drop below 45 – 50 degrees Fahrenheit tropical houseplants are apt to suffer cold damage. The first light frost, generally expected about September 15th, may be disastrous. Houseplants brought indoors in early September have an opportunity to become acclimated indoors before the heat comes on. When the furnace is turned on the humidity levels drop. This may cause leaf drop or browning on plants still acclimated to the high humidity outdoors.

Before bringing plants indoors, examine each one carefully to insure that you are not bringing in spiders, aphids, scales, white flies or mites. While not all pests may be harmful to your plant's health or your home, they still present a nuisance. Check the soil for millipedes, sow bugs or other soil pests. These may feed on tender roots, possibly killing the plant.

You can remove several pests by washing each plant under a jet of lukewarm water. If no obvious pests are present, washing may be all that is needed. If sucking insects are discovered on the foliage of stems, a spray of insecticidal soap will usually control them without damaging the plant. Spider mites are more difficult to control. These tiny sucking pests can be found on the undersides of leaves or betray their presence by weaving tiny webs. Use only a houseplant pesticide that says it controls mites. Finally, eradicate any insects living in the soil by using a pesticide product approved for indoor use.

This is also a good time to prune or to pot up a plant that has out grown its container. Do not place plants in larger pots unless they really need it, as many houseplants are dormant in the winter and will grow little, if at all. It is easy to over water these plants, particularly if they are in a pot that is a bit too large.

Finally, even after all of these measures it is still wise to quarantine plants brought back indoors and to keep them separate from those that never went outside. A few weeks of isolation may prevent a serious problem from spreading through your plants.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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