

## KEEPING HOUSEPLANTS WHILE ON VACATION

Vacations may be great for people, but they are sometimes hard on the houseplant left behind. The ideal solution is to have a reliable friend stop by twice a week or so to water those plants which may need it. Leave concise directions or the friend may not water as you prefer. If this solution is not possible, with some simple preparations, you may leave plants unattended for a few days to several weeks.

First move plants away from direct sun or strong light. Plants lose less water by evaporation at lower light intensities. If plants need to be kept for a week or longer, place them in a large clear plastic bag which acts like a terrarium. Trim off any flower buds and flowers. Water the plants so the soil is evenly moist before sliding them into plastic bags. You can place several plants in a large bag. Tie the ends shut with a twist tie. Do not leave this setup in an area that gets direct sunlight as the temperatures will get very high inside the plastic bags and your plants may cook.

An alternative to the plastic terrarium is to put 1 ½ to 3 inches of water in a large tub, dishpan, or even a bathtub where sunlight is present. Place clay bricks in the water so that they protrude an inch or so above the water. Set the pots on the bricks. The plants will take up water through the bricks and pots, and evaporations from the tub will provide localized high humidity. This method will work only if the plants are growing in unglazed clay pots.

If the plants are out of the sun for long periods of time, they may look a bit pale or stretched when you return. Prune back any leggy new growth. A week back in their favorite window will bring the color of most houseplants back to normal.

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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