

Overwintering Tropical Plants

Make Peace that some Plants cannot be Overwintered

Tropical flowers dazzle in the heat of summer but are some of the first to fizzle when temperatures fall. Make peace with the fact that some plants cannot be overwintered. True annuals such as marigolds, zinnias, and nicotiana typically do not thrive indoors. Other annuals, such as geraniums, coleus and begonias can survive indoors in a sunny spot. Tropical plants such as hibiscus, canna, caladium, alocasia, as well as your indoor tropical plants that were put outside for the summer, can be overwintered successfully.

Decide what Plants are going to be brought in

If the plants are in containers, hose them down and check for insects. At this time the plants should be treated with a curative treatment for mites as well as aphids and mealy bug, which we will discuss below. Mites are a common pest on outdoor plants and their small size makes it difficult to detect. The warm, dry conditions of your home encourage their proliferation during the winter. Watch for leaves that are pale or look stippled and possibly feel gritty. If present, mites can be eliminated by washing thoroughly with a mild detergent or spraying with an appropriate indoor pesticide labeled for use on mites.

Prune Plants

Geraniums and begonias can be pruned back by one third and indoor tropical plants can be trimmed and cleaned up as well. Clean any debris on the surface of the soil. Many tropical plants that grow from underground bulbs, corms, or tubers, including caladium, calla lily, canna, dahlia, ginger, and tuberous begonia are easy to overwinter. When night temperatures drop into the low 40s, the leaves of plants will brown and begin to die, and this is your cue to remove them.

Remove the dirt from the swollen portions of the roots and set them on newspapers in a shaded area or the garage to cure for a couple of days. Cut off the top growth and pack the bulbs, corms, and tubers in a box filled with dry peat moss or vermiculite. Store in a dark area where the temperature are between 35° and 50°F.

Plants that can be Overwintered

Coleus, Flowering Maple, Geranium, Tropical Hibiscus, Ferns, Wandering Jew, Palms (watch for spider mite), Citrus.

Watch the Forecast

Bring tropical plants in when nighttime temperatures begin to drop below 50°F. Mid October is the latest. Full sun tropical plants should be put in the brightest area available, such as a west window. Shade tropical plants need a window with bright indirect light.

After your Tropical Plant is Inside

Check your tropical plants with your finger and if the top inch to two inches of soil is dry, then it's time to water. Watering plants depends on a variety of factors, including light, temperature, and pot size.

Curatives for Tropical and Indoor Plants

- Always read the label(s) and apply accordingly. Follow all safety recommendations on label.
- Bonide Insecticidal Soap (potassium of fatty acids) — this multi-purpose insect control is a contact spray for pests and powdery mildew and must be sprayed directly to achieve control. Spray both leaf surfaces and stems. Repeat treatment weekly or bi-weekly if needed.
- Espoma Organic Neem Oil 3n1 fungicide, miticide, insecticide. Thorough plant coverage is essential to obtain optimal levels of control.
- Bonide Systemic Houseplant Insect Control (imidacloprid-granule) — systemic insecticide to be applied to soil, scratched in, and watered. Protects plants from damage for up to 2 months. Excellent control of all listed pests and effective for controlling mealy bugs. This should not be used if pets and/or children tend to chew on plants.