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## Overwintering Plant Tips

### **How do I keep plants alive that won't survive outside during the winter?**

For most plants, you can bring them indoors and place near a bright window with an eastern, southern, or western exposure in fall, prior to frost. Sometimes you can cut large plants back by half to two-thirds before bringing them in the house to reduce their size and slow down growth. References usually suggest moving plants to a shady spot for a week or two and checking for pests or diseases before bringing the plants indoors, but you can skip that step and opt to do battle later should problems arise.

Winter care is simple, water them whenever the soil dries out, and give the pots a quarter turn every few weeks so the plants don't get too lopsided from reaching toward the light. The dry indoor air can take a toll on tropical plants, so provide additional humidity by grouping the plants in masses and misting frequently. If possible, put the plants atop trays filled with gravel and water. Humidifiers help, too, as does turning the thermostat down to the mid-60s. Once the days start to lengthen again, provide an occasional taste of diluted fertilizer. Plants really only need fertilizer when they are actively growing.

Some plants will drop many of their leaves due to change in temperatures in fall or going from outside to inside, before sprouting anew with smaller foliage sized more appropriately for the reduced light level. If your plants struggle due to the lack of bright, natural light, consider supplementing the available light with some type of grow light.

### **My grandma always kept her geraniums from year to year, what's the trick?**

There are a couple of ways to overwinter geraniums indoors. You can pot them up, cut them back by half and bring them inside and keep them in a bright room. Water sparingly and check frequently for white fly or other pest infestation. If they stay healthy through the winter, you can plant them outside again in May after the last chance of frost has passed.

Or you can lift the plants out of the garden, shake the soil from their roots and stick them in a paper bag to store in a frost-free shed, unheated basement or the garage. Once a month during the winter, soak the roots of each plant for a couple of hours. In April, prune each plant way back and remove dead leaves (which will be most of them). Then pot up the plants, water thoroughly and keep them in a sunny window, and they should be growing fresh new leaves in time to move outdoors in May.

### **Which bulbs do I need to dig up & how do I store for next year?**

In fall you plant a number of bulbs, like tulips & daffodils that remain in the ground from year to year, but there are a number of summer flowering bulbs (or tubers), like cannas, gladiolas, caladiums, and dahlias, that will not survive our winters if left outside in the ground. You could grow these plants as annuals and forget about them or you can dig them up for the following year. If stored properly in a cool dark place, summer bulbs and tubers can survive the winter, ready to be potted up in spring, or planted into the garden for more summer blooms.

Here's what to do:

1. Dig bulbs or tubers up after frost has blackened foliage. Carefully remove as much soil as you can.
2. Cut the leaves off, leaving a stem about an inch or two long. Leaves and stems are not needed, as the plants are going to be dormant and not making any growth through the winter.
3. You can either carefully wash the soil off the tubers or bulbs, or just let it dry and work it off by hand later.
4. Leave bulbs or tubers exposed to air in a frost-free place for a couple of weeks. Any remaining stem should be dry before going into storage, otherwise rot could develop.
5. Store in vermiculite or dry peat in paper bags or cardboard boxes in a cool, frost free place at 40 to 50°F.
6. Dahlia tubers are prone to drying up somewhat, and these should be stored in slightly moistened peat moss. Check them through the winter, and if they've shriveled, moisten the peat moss. Some authorities suggest plumping shriveled dahlia bulbs up in a bucket of water overnight. If you do this, let them dry thoroughly before you put them back into storage.