



Horticulture Tips - Over-wintering Plants in Pots

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If you leave any plant potted out of doors over the winter, it probably will succumb. Primarily because there is no protection for the roots in a pot sitting on the ground. However, if the pot has been buried over the season, as we might do to control the wild habit of mint, it would survive if it is a hardy perennial. Otherwise, kiss that sweetness goodbye!

Roses in pots:

If you leave them outside they surely will die, but if you bring them indoors they lack the needed full sun. So, the third option is to bring them indoors after temperatures have dropped below 25 degrees. Allow the rose to go dormant by placing the container in a non-heated room [like a basement or garage] with a window for some natural light (If you add heat or sun, the rose will come out of dormancy).

Keep the soil slightly moist but omit regular watering. Remember, the root is dormant. It can't use water. So wet soil will only rot the roots.

When the rose starts to break dormancy in the spring by forming buds, put it outside in the sun and water thoroughly. In New England, the occurrence of a late spring frost is not unknown. If that occurs, bring the pot indoors temporarily or keep it in the sun and cover it completely with a blanket. Once temperatures rise again, remove the sheltering layers.

Herbs in pots:

Many perennial herbs overwinter with ease in the ground. These herbs include chives, garlic chives, sage, tarragon, thyme, oregano, mint, angelica, and lavender. You know the roots have gone dormant when the leaves dry out. That's the time to trim them to 6" [except lavender] and mulch them well with leaves, compost, and/or wood chips. Dormancy usually happens after a hard frost. This mulching protects the plants from frequent frost-thaw episodes of early winter. You don't want to see your plant catapulted from the ground! Mulching well protects from this.

Tender perennials, like rosemary, and biennial parsley can be dug, potted, and brought inside. Let's talk about rosemary first.

Many rosemary's are hardy to zone 6-7 with heavy mulching. I haven't tried this yet but will next year since my rosemary has been excavated and recycled already. Perhaps some club members can still try this and report back to us.

Indoors, rosemary requires temperatures of 50-60 degrees, high humidity through misting, and enough water to keep the soil from drying out. A pebble tray helps with the constant need for humidity. But few gardeners that I know have the correct temps, humidity, and correct light for

rosemary to flourish inside. It is possible but not for me.

Rosemary indoors is prone to aphid infestations. Personally, I'm not going to eat an herb treated with chemicals to rid it of pests. [Oh! Where did those nesting lady bugs go?]

Parsley is hearty; mine is going strong even today [mid-November]. I could still dig it from the ground, being very certain to get all of its extensive root system. They run deep; the plant requires a very deep pot. Then, water it well, leave it outside for a few weeks in the shade. In digging it, some root damage has occurred. Sun would stress the plant further so keep it shaded. Once the parsley looks perky again, bring it inside before another frost occurs. Give it lots of sun. The plant will continue to grow so go on and harvest it.

Let's review: dig it without damaging the extensive root system, put it in a huge pot and eventually drag it inside, give it lots of sun indoors, and then expect the seed stalk to grow and ruin the flavor of the herb. You know, I say why bother? Parsley is inexpensive and readily available in the grocery market!



Summering houseplants:

Houseplants that you move outside in the warmth of summer are often tropical plants that need to return indoors before the thermometer drops to 50 degrees at night. Check before bringing them indoors; check for litter like pine needles, leaves, acorns, etc. Remove all of this detritus. Check for critters like aphids, mealy bugs, spider mites and remove them with a thorough hosing. Check the soil level for critters, too. You may have to apply an insecticidal soap [easily made at home] to the foliage and soil. If your plant has outgrown its pot, re-pot before bringing it inside. Prune dead leaves and stems, flower stalks, etc. Because light and humidity change between the outside and the in, plants have to acclimate. This takes about two weeks, about the time it takes us to acclimate to turning the clock back! Move pots inside at night, back outside during the day. Over these two weeks, gradually increase the time the plant spends indoors and decrease the time it is out of doors. Until it doesn't go out anymore.... Over the winter, these plants will not need as much water so add moisture only when the soil is dry to the touch. If you find too much time on your hands because these now indoor plants require less TLC, clean your windows to enhance the amount of available light. Still idle time on your hands? Come on over to my house. My plants will love ya!

If there is a topic you would like to read about, please send an email to Sandra.