



BRINGING THE OUTDOORS IN FOR THE WINTER

By Dr. Matthew Lisy, UConn Adjunct Faculty

I don't want to depress anyone, but our outdoor gardening is almost over. Fairly soon, when temps start dipping below 50°F, we should bring in our houseplants. Not everything that beautified our yard all summer needs to fall victim to Old Man Winter, however. Some plants can winter over nicely indoors.

The first thing to understand is that plants will be going from one extreme to another. A brightly lit window, even if sunny, does not really compare to unfiltered direct sun. Fluorescent or LED light fixtures are great, but you either need a lot of them or have to place them close to the plants. Either way, leaves are adapted to the light they are accustomed to, so your plants will probably lose some (like when you bring home a new plant from a greenhouse).

There are a number of hitchhikers that can enter our home when we bring our plants inside. If your tray or saucer has some water in it, then you might accidentally introduce mosquitos into your home. Spiders are probably the most common incidental guest. They are normally good and eat some pests, but their webs can get annoying. Earwigs are another frequently seen little critter, but they usually do not do too much damage. Avoid overwatering the plant, which will allow unwanted guests a moist space in which to survive. One of the most interesting visitors I ever had was a frog! Luckily, I was able to capture him and release him back outside. It is always a wise idea to inspect plants thoroughly before bringing them back into the house.

In addition to bringing in houseplants, banana, citrus, and fig trees, some annuals can make fine additions to the home. My absolute favorite are the geraniums. Many times throughout history, these plants were kept in greenhouses or conservatories year-round. A friend of mine said she likes to bring in some coleus too. Both of these plants are rather expensive, and it might be nice to overwinter them for next year. Some people like to overwinter their pepper plants. I find that the best for this are the really hot ones, like the habanero, as they seem to grow slowly. The following year you will not be able to eat all the fruit that one plant can produce!

There are some very pretty plants that just do not seem to do well indoors. The first that comes to mind is the calibrachoa. Although beautiful outside, they struggle indoors. They are not very

forgiving if they get too dry and almost always suffer from western flower thrips. The same story is true for petunias. Most bedding plants are best left outside - purchase new ones in the spring.



Calibrachoa. Photo by dmp2007

No matter what plants you bring in during the fall, watch out for aphids. There are many species of all different colors. If a few sneak in, they can quickly reproduce asexually and spread to many of your houseplants. It is good practice, when bringing a plant inside, to isolate it from your regular indoor houseplants for a few weeks before making it a part of your collection. This is best done in a separate room with the door closed. Any trouble should present itself by then. You don't have to bring in the entire plant. For years I kept my geranium collection going by taking a few cuttings from each plant. These overwintered nicely, took up less space, and required less care.

For your gardening questions, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.