

# Summer Vacation for House Plants

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Summer is a busy time for gardeners. There are plants to fertilize, gardens to weed, and produce to pick. It may be easy to neglect house plant care amid the activity of summer gardening. Some house plants can be moved outside for the summer, allowing joint care with outdoor plantings. In addition to simplifying plant care, moving your house plants outside can give them a break from low light conditions indoors and encourages lush growth. Maintenance chores are also easier to perform outside where the mess is not going to end up on the floor.

Wait until the weather has become warm and settled and all danger of frost is past before leaving plants out overnight. Nighttime temperatures should be over fifty degrees F. If cool weather threatens, even for one night, bring the plants back in lest they are damaged by the cold.

Whether you move a plant outdoors for an afternoon of sunshine and fresh air or give it an entire summer outside, remember that light outside is much brighter than light inside the house. Even a plant grown in bright, direct light indoors will require an adjustment period before it can tolerate direct sun outside. Do not think you are doing a plant a favor by moving it from a dark room to a sunny spot for a few hours of bright light. You may sunburn the leaves and end up with a plant in worse condition than you started.

Begin by placing plants in an area of deep shade and move them into successively brighter spots every week or so until they reach the desired location. Cacti and succulents can handle full sun, while flowering plants require light shade. Foliage plants should be placed in light or deep shade according to their indoor needs.

Final placement of plants will also depend on exposure to wind and rain. Choose sheltered spots out of the way of winds that may topple top-heavy plants or dry the soil. Gesneriads and other fuzzy leaved plants should be kept on a porch or somewhere else where rain can not spatter their leaves. If plants are beneath trees, rain may not reach them in adequate amounts. As with all outdoor container plants, house plants dry out quickly and need to be checked frequently for watering needs. Hanging baskets will need more frequent watering than plants at ground level because they are exposed to drying breezes, so watch them vigilantly. Take care that several days of rain don't provide too

much water and drown roots. You may want to bring plants indoors during severe weather.

Watering can be simplified by sinking the pots directly into the soil in flower borders or into a larger container filled with moist peat moss. Less water will be lost than from free-standing individual pots, and the plants will draw some moisture from the surrounding media.

Continue fertilizing house plants that are summering outside as you would for indoor plants. The high light levels will allow rapid growth if nutrient and water needs are met. If any of the plants are approaching a stage where repotting is in order, perform this task before the summer so recovery will occur while the plant is growing rapidly.

Watch for insect damage and treat as you would indoors if any occurs. Placing some window screening in the bottom of the pots will prevent pests such as sowbugs from entering the pot. At the end of the summer, soak the plants in water for fifteen minutes to drown or drive out any insects that have taken up residence.

Return the plants to the house by repeating the process of acclimatization in reverse. Move the plants to progressively shadier spots so they can get used to lower light levels before coming indoors. Be sure to complete the return trip before nights become cool.

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