August 28, 2022

**Bringing Houseplants Indoors**

"Happily we bask in this warm September sun, which illuminates all creatures."

-Henry David Thoreau

Even though it’s still very early September, I know I need to plan ahead for my houseplants if I don’t want it to be a mad scramble if we get an early frost. Many of us have houseplants that take a summer vacation out on the deck or patio. But before you bring them back indoors for the winter, there is some prep work you’ll want to do.

The houseplants that I allow to go on summer vacation are typically tropical plants as they can appreciate the warmth and humidity of our summer weather. Just like in the spring, they need to get acclimated to our indoor temps, warmth, and lighting so they don’t throw a fit by withering and dropping all their leaves.

Knowing when to end your houseplants’ summer vacation can be determined by watching overnight temps. If the temps are going to drop below 45 degrees, it’s time to bring them in. If it gets any colder, you will most likely see damage on any newer plant growth.

Your houseplants will need to get used to the lower light levels in our homes so move them to a shady place a couple weeks prior to bring them indoors. This is a great time to trim them back if they’ve become a little overgrown.

Before you bring houseplants indoors, check for insect hitchhikers. I did a poor job last year and fought mealybugs all winter long. Some other major pests include aphids; spider mites; fungus gnats; root ball pests such as pill bugs, millipedes, and slugs; scales, and whiteflies. Preventing an insect problem is easier than eliminating one. If the plant was placed on the ground, it may have some insects that got in through the drain hole so take the plant out of the pot and check the soil. Find a place where you can segregate your houseplants from others that are already in the home. This will give you time to eliminate an infestation before it spreads to your entire houseplant population. Carefully inspect each plant for signs of pests, especially the underside of leaves and near the stems. Even if you don’t see any insect, give them all a shower, using a handheld showerhead or spray nozzle to wash the underside as well as the top side. If you have insects such as aphids and mealybugs, you can wipe them off using a cotton swap dipped in rubbing alcohol. Scale insects will need to be scraped off. If the infestation is in the early stages, you can potentially eliminate it with multiple applications of insecticidal soap. Read the labels carefully to make sure it’s effective against your pest. For more details on how to deal with a particular insect problem, visit <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/common-houseplant-insects-related-pests/>.

Once your houseplants are indoors, cut back on the watering and fertilizing. Winter is their dormant time, so they don’t need as much water or fertilizer as they did during the growing season. Fertilizing will start in the spring and the plants need just water so they don’t dry out.

While your houseplants rest, they still need bright, indirect light. If you don’t have a sunny window, consider supplementing with grow lights. Our homes tend to have dry air in the winter so your plants will appreciate a little extra humidity. We run humidifier in the winter, and I place my houseplants near it. You can place your plants in a pebble tray with some water or mist your plants daily if you have time. Follow these steps and you should have happy houseplants until their next summer vacation.

This week’s article is written by Jeannie Manis, a Wisconsin Certified Sauk County Master Gardener Volunteer.If you have any gardening questions, please contact the Extension Sauk County by emailing to trripp@wisc.edu or calling the University of Wisconsin Madison Division of Extension Sauk County office at 608-355-3250.