

The Winter "In" Plants

by Pat Stachon

As snow, wind and ice are with us for the next few months, and our gardens are covered by their winter comforters (snow), it is time now to turn our attention to the houseplants that we brought in last fall.

Our indoor plants' problems are defined by where we place them indoors and how we treat them. Problems include over or under-watering, sunburn, drafts from windows and heating vents, temperature fluctuations and dry indoor conditions.

Watering plants with rainwater would be ideal, but they do tolerate tap water. I am fortunate to have rainwater available, and occasionally I catch melting snow from the roof in a bucket on warm days. Plants prefer water at room temperature. Watering with cold water is detrimental when the droplets splash on the leaves causing marbling. Pour away any surplus water sitting in a saucer after 20 minutes so plants roots do not become waterlogged. A plant that has been overwatered is under great stress because its roots are drowning in compacted, airless soil. It will look very unhappy, have wilting leaves, which may lead you to think that it needs water!

While learning to care for houseplants, I lost a few to overwatering and found a moisture tester was a huge help. I still use it when in doubt and am often surprised to see from the arrow indicator that there is adequate moisture in the soil and no water is needed.

Certain plants are prone to sunburn when exposed to direct sunlight. Light levels increase as the angle of the sun changes. Move your plants from the window as necessary.

Plants that are losing leaves may need more protection from entrances and heating vents.

Temperature fluctuations are a problem in winter for plants on window-sills. Most of us

lower the temperature at night before going to bed and raise it again in the morning. This is stressful for plants. Keeping them at a constant temperature is the key.

Indoor gardening is a wonderful hobby, particularly during the winter months.

There is an enormous variety of houseplants available on the market to-day. Choosing the right plant for the right location in your home shouldn't be difficult.

You may discover that you like indoor gardening all year round!