Over Wintering Plants

The cooler weather earlier this week was a good reminder of the fact that winter is on its way. The average first freeze of the winter season arrives in mid-November, so there are still a few weeks to condition tropical and tender plants for the inevitable move inside for protection.

Key factors for maintaining the health and appearance of plants over-wintered indoors include light, water, nutrient management, temperature and control of pests. The most common cultural mistakes made regarding these plants involve improper watering (too much), insufficient lighting, placement in areas with extreme temperature changes and drafty locations and over fertilization.

Many people use ferns to adorn their decks and porches during the warmer months of spring and summer. The Boston fern, *Nephrolepis exaltata*, is the most popular fern used for outdoor greenery, but when the threat of frost arrives, they must be brought indoors if they are to survive. Unfortunately many homeowners experience that the ferns, when brought inside to weather the long, cold months of winter, don’t always thrive as they did outdoors. More often than not, the ferns begin shedding their leaves, creating an unsightly container of bare stems and a collection of dried leaves on the floor. This can be avoided by knowing the growing requirements of the Boston fern.

Boston ferns require plenty of indirect or diffused light, between twelve to sixteen hours of light each day. Place indoor ferns near a bright east or west-facing window. In locations where there is not enough natural light, a grow light can be used.

Maintaining proper levels of temperature and humidity are also necessary for successful growth of the Boston fern. These ferns prefer daytime temperatures that range from 65°F to 75°F. Evening temperatures should be cooler. Plants should be placed in a cooler location of the home, or in a room where heat vents can be closed to maintain the right temperature. Humidity requirements needed, can be provided by misting the foliage on a daily basis or by using a humidifier to maintain the humidity level of fifty percent.

During the winter, allow the surface of the soil to become a little dry before watering. Water thoroughly with distilled water to maintain adequate soil moisture.

Fertilization with a nitrogen-rich water-soluble houseplant food is not necessary during the winter months. To help achieve a rich, green color, the ferns can be given a monthly dose of a mixture of two tablespoons of Epsom salt with a gallon of water.
With the holiday season fast approaching, many people are excited about the pecan harvest season which is near. Many pies, cakes and other favorite holiday dishes require pecans and the fresher the pecan taste the better the dish. Proper storage of the pecans is essential to preserve visual and taste qualities. Pecans should be stored unshelled if possible; this will increase the shelf life by protecting the kernel from bruising and reduces the oxidation of the kernel and absorption of other food odors, resulting in an off flavor.

If unshelled pecans are to be stored without refrigeration, keep in a cool, well-ventilated area. The storage containers should allow for plenty of air movement and be able to keep the pecans dry.

Both shelled and unshelled pecans may be stored under refrigeration in airtight containers. The average shelf life depends upon the storage temperature and on whether the nut is shelled or unshelled. Under normal home refrigeration conditions (45-32°F), unshelled pecans can be successfully stored for 9-18 months. Shelled pecans under the same conditions will keep fresh for about 6-12 months.

Don’t let those unused holiday pecans go to waste. Proper storage can maintain a quality supply of pecans for year-round use.

Remember – when gardening, have fun, be creative, be informed and be safe.

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