

Moving Houseplants Inside for Winter

By Ward Upham, Kansas State University

Many people with houseplants move some of them outside for the summer to give them better growing conditions and help them recover from the stress of an indoor environment. However, as fall approaches and night temperatures approach 50 degrees F, it is time to think about bringing these plants inside for the winter.

Houseplants that have been kept outdoors are accustomed to receiving much more sunlight than they do in an indoor environment. Research done in Florida in the late 1970s revealed that tropical plants grown under high light conditions produce "sun leaves" while those grown under low light conditions have "shade leaves." These leaf types differ structurally in that sun leaves have less chlorophyll (the substance that plants use to convert sunlight to energy) and the chlorophyll that is present is located deeper inside the leaf. Sun leaves also tend to be thick, small and numerous while shade leaves are thinner, larger and fewer in number. When plants are moved from one light condition to another they need time to adjust. This process is known as acclimatization. If they are forced to acclimatize too quickly, they will drop their sun leaves and produce a new set of shade leaves. If the acclimatization process is slower and less drastic, the plant can convert their sun leaves to the shade leaves that do better under low light. If going from shade to sun, this process is reversed.



So how do we help our houseplants acclimatize to the lower light levels we find inside? Houseplants brought in from outside should be started out in an area of the home that receives plenty of light and then gradually moved to their permanent, darker location. This process should take four to eight weeks depending on the degree of difference in light levels between the initial and final location of the plant.

Understanding plant processes allows us to anticipate potential problems. Acclimatization gives our houseplants a greater chance of retaining leaves and avoiding the stress of completely replacing them.

Ward Upham is a Horticultural Extension Associate at K-State Research and Extension in Manhattan, Kansas. Upham contributes to the weekly electronic publication "Horticulture 2000," and helps to provide publication education of horticultural through his work at K-State.

The TGOA/MGCA national web site thanks the author for submitting this article on October 04, 2000. Tracking number: WSP2000100400018