



Riverview Garden Club Helpful Hints



November 2018

Overwintering potted plants can be a challenge with the possibilities of shattered pots and frozen plants. Container grown plants are at a severe disadvantage when cold weather arrives. Hardy plants have developed foliage, stems and branches that can withstand very low temperatures, but their roots are sensitive and vulnerable to freezing. To better the odds of a container plant's survival, choose ones marked two zones colder than zone 6, own zone, to zone 4 or lower. Also use large containers for plants that remain outdoors as the greater volume of soil surrounding the plant will provide increased insulation around the roots.

Potted plants that will be exposed to chilling winds should be moved to a sheltered location close to a building, under an eave, or near a south facing wall away from high winds and winter sun. Group pots together placing the coldest sensitive plants at the center of the group to receive additional protection from the hardier plants.

If possible do not use terra cotta pots because they are made of porous clay not suitable for leaving outdoors in freezing temperatures which can cause them to crack or shatter. Glazed pots, which are fired at higher temperatures, tend to withstand freezing better than terra cotta. If terra cotta or glazed containers are being used, wrap the sides of the pots with layers of bubble wrap or burlap covered with plastic to prevent them from absorbing additional moisture once the plants go dormant and their water requirements are minimal.

Other container material, which may limit the damage from freezing, is sturdy plastic and fiberglass pots. Some plastic pots may crack if the soil inside expands as it freezes. Wooden containers made of durable hardwoods are better suited, and will age gracefully over time.

There are steps to prepare your plants for winter container storage. As days shorten and temperatures drop, plants enter the first phase of dormancy by slowing growth. To help prepare your plants for winter, stop fertilizing them by midsummer to reduce tender new growth that is vulnerable to frost, but do continue watering regularly through fall. Evergreens grown in pots, especially broad-leaved evergreens which are

particularly vulnerable to desiccating winter winds, should be watered well until the first hard frost.

Woody plants that remain outdoors in pots have a few requirements. To prevent the branches of deciduous trees and shrubs from whipping around and breaking in winter, loosely tie branches together after the leaves have dropped. Evergreen woody plants can be sprayed with an anti-desiccant, and may need to be protected against harsh winter sun with burlap.

Another thought is to try to recreate the naturally insulating effects of the earth. Find an area in your garden that you can dig up, and sink the pots into the ground so their roots will be insulated by the surrounding soil. Then mulch heavily with straw, shredded bark, or shredded leaves.

To create a temporary cold frame, arrange bales of hay to form four walls and top with an old window, heavy duty clear plastic, or a plexiglass lid to store small pots in winter's freezing cold. Cluster as closely as possible and add mulch.

Regardless of which method you choose to protect your overwintering plants, bushes, or trees in pots, remove the dressings from each when spring arrives, and if protected properly, you'll find them rejuvenated by their winter sleep.



--Sandy