

They’re called *Houseplants* for a reason!

Call me an old poop, call me a purist, call me whatever. I’m a strict believer that indoor plants are for indoors, and outside plants should stay outside.

Sure, moving your houseplants outside for the summer perks them up, makes them grow a lot, and sometimes is the only way you are able to sneak in a few “new” friends in the fall without drawing undue attention! And I understand those plants just LOVE being in nearly perfect conditions outside for the summer.

The main problem with this egress is that sometime in the fall, these same plants are going to have to be brought back inside. Here is where you can get into trouble.

* The light is going to be drastically reduced from outside to inside.
* Watering habits will have to change from outside (faster drying) to inside (not as often)
* Larger spaces may be needed to accommodate your newly huge plants.
* Scariest of all – you will eventually have to deal with pests brought in unseen.

The difference in light intensities is a huge obstacle that you can overcome if you put in extra effort to get the plant’s leaves ready for reduced light. The best way to do this (beginning around Labor Day) is to bring your houseplants back inside for three days, then move them back where they were outside for 3 days. Do this for at least two to four weeks beginning in early September.

If that sounds like a lot of work, it probably will be. Use a little wagon. Use one of those creatures that lives in your house. Figure a way that will make the task easy. You will be rewarded with some very nice plants come spring – a result of your attention and some extra work.

Inside the top surface of a plant leaf are elongated cells called “palisades” cells. These cells either expand (become “thicker”) in high light, or contract (become “thin”) in low light. Think of how your skin changes colors in high light or low light. So – when your plants have been outside in high light, the palisades cells are thicker – to protect the inside workings of the leaves from too much light.

When you suddenly bring your plants back indoors for the winter, the thickened palisades cells can prevent enough light from getting into the leaves. Over a period of just a few days, your plant will probably react by dropping some or a lot of leaves to accommodate the needs of the plant in the lower light environment.

To help prevent this “shock” to your plants, you should move your plants indoors for 3 days, then back outside for 3 days. This will help slowly “shrink” the palisades cells down to a level that will get the whole plant used to the lower light conditions! Fewer leaves will be forfeited this way, and your “shocked” plants should be better able to adjust to the lower light indoors.

A lot of work? Yep. But they ARE depending on you to do a good job, right? They will reward you by not being sad and pitiful all winter long waiting for summer again. Get a wagon, and move them in and out for about two weeks.

You should start the move around Labor Day. There will be slightly more indoor light, and the days are still a little longer – giving your plants that much more time to settle in. If you haven’t moved them in yet, DO IT NOW.

Along with the reduced light, the next thing you need to be concerned with is BUGS. On these trips in and out, you should be checking for the following varmints: Aphids, Mealybugs, Whiteflies, Snails/Slugs, Grasshoppers, and Spider Mites. Generally Speaking, spraying with water or using a (makeup) brush to physically remove the pests does a pretty good job. You just need to be gentle not to damage the leaves.

By the way - most pests are going to be hiding UNDER the leaves. You should be checking and physically removing the pests each time you move them in/out. As the eggs hatch over a two week period, you will probably remove most with your efforts. Mealybugs are probably the most difficult to deal with. Rubbing alcohol and a Q-tip (dab every cottony mass) at least once a week over a period of several weeks MAY get the job done. Unfortunately, there are also root Mealybugs…….

 You need to remember: plants which are no longer in high light and very warm conditions and which are used to growing fast and getting watered often are brought indoors are no longer going to need watering as often. Lower light, cooler conditions, and slow growing will demand you pay close attention not to water too often. Remember you should always water thoroughly, just not as often.

If all this sounds like too much work – simply keep your inside plants inside. You can do it.