Proper Watering of Houseplants in the Winter

Houseplants often suffer and eventually die during the winter months because of over watering. The early symptoms of over watering are wilting and yellowing. The roots are actually killed by the lack of oxygen in the potting mix caused by water saturation. Tropical
Emerald Ash Borer - Reports of EAB damaged ash trees have been coming in from around the state.

Rosemary - Learn how to care for an indoor rosemary topiary.

Voles - Are very active in winter months. Gnawing bark of woody plants and tunneling through grassy areas.

Houseplants kept in the low light conditions of winter do not need as much water as when growing in bright light.

Always allow the potting mix to dry out between watering. Test the soil’s moisture by sticking your finger into the potting mix. If it is dry to the touch, water thoroughly and then do not water again until it is dry once again. Regardless of the type of pot, make sure it has drainage holes in the bottom.

Occasional wilting does not do serious harm to a plant. The growing media is also very important; always use a mix that contains peat moss, perlite and/or bark. Don’t use soil from the garden for pots. It does not drain very well and can cause prolonged sogginess of the roots as well as introduce insect pests and disease.

Read more on Houseplants
Watch our video series on houseplants

Resources for Starting Seeds Indoors

Starting seeds indoors is about as much fun as a food gardener can have in late winter! The idea is to grow baby plants (a.k.a. transplants or starts) for 2-8 weeks (depending on the vegetable and rate of plant growth) and then plant outdoors where the crops will mature and be harvested. Just about any crop can be started inside and transplanted outside. With a small investment and bit of space you can grow hundreds of healthy transplants. All of the supplies you need can be found at home (reused food containers for starting seeds) or purchased locally from hardware stores, garden centers, and big box stores.

Growing your own transplants instead of directly seeding them in the garden:

- saves you money - this may take a few years since there are first-year set-up costs
- increases your garden’s output - get earlier harvests by starting with transplants instead of seeds
- allows you to grow the crops and cultivars you like best - no need to plant only what’s available in retail stores
- gives you better control of germination and plant stand - fewer skips, no thinning
% Starting seeds and caring for houseplants in the winter in the January HGIC Newsletter

- lessens pest and weather risks—no worries about cool, wet weather keeping you from planting or encouraging seed rotting diseases

Check out all the starting seeds resources we have online:

- GIEI Starting Seeds Hub: Lights | Containers | Planting | Seedling care | Potting up | Hardening plants
- HGIC YouTube Starting Seeds Indoors Playlist: Master Gardener Kent Philips gives step-by-step instructions on how to start your seeds indoors. Learn when and how to plant, what materials you’ll need, how to properly care for your seedlings, and how to transplant them outside.

--- View on YouTube

Learn how to fold paper pots out of old newspaper! Great for potting up seedlings started this winter. Step by step instructions located at http://go.umd.edu/paperpot. Courtesy of UME, Garrett Co. and Allegany Co. offices.

--- View on YouTube

Featured Video

Queen Annes' County Master Gardeners - Year in Review
My mother has given me some vegetable and flower seeds that are several years old. Are they still viable or should they be thrown away? I have gotten two different opinions from my gardening friends, one told me that seeds never get old, and another said they might not germinate.

As seeds age, germination rates decline, but this varies widely between plant species. For example, onion seed is usually good for only one season but tomato seeds will be okay for 5 years if kept cool and dry. Test for viability by trying the following method. Place ten seeds in a damp paper towel, carefully fold the towel up and place in a sealed plastic bag. Then store it in a warm area. Check every few days to see if any germination occurred. If a root breaks through the seed coat, that is a good sign. Most seeds germinate within a week to three week period. If less than 7 out of 10 seeds germinate, you need to decide whether to
discard the seeds or to sow them at a heavier rate. Save your seeds in appropriately labeled paper envelopes placed in the freezer.

Have a plant or pest question? University of Maryland Extension’s experts have answers! Send in your questions and photos to Ask an Expert.

Have a suggestion for a topic to cover in the HGIC newsletter? Send in your suggestions.

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