

Winter Protection of Plants

Protecting Tender Plants in the Ground & Plants in Containers

PROTECTING TENDER PLANTS IN THE GROUND

What you need: Burlap, some bamboo stakes, a large poly bag, some string and some DRY straw!

Step 1: Secure some bamboo stakes (metal or cedar will suffice) in the form of a “tepee” or “tripod” around the plant. It would be best if the legs of the frame are at an angle. That way if it rains the water will slide off at an angle and not congregate in the growing tips. Secure these with string or wire at the top for rigidity.

Step 2: Place some straw (preferably dry) at the base to insulate the root structure.

Step 3: Wrap (loosely) at least 3 layers of burlap around the frame. Try to get the weave of the burlap at different angles. Secure the burlap with some string to the frame work.

Step 4: Once completely covered with burlap, pull a plastic bag over the top like a rain hat. The plastic should be loosely wrapped over the burlap until about 30% of the burlap is covered. This will protect the growing tip from cold and wet weather. These are the two major contributors to the rotting of plants in our area.

Step 5: The plastic bag can be lowered or raised depending on the climate. If our winter is dry and mild the plant will need to breathe. In that case lift the bag up slightly. If the weather seems to be cold and wet you may want to lower the bag a little to cover and protect the burlap a little more.

OVER-WINTERING CONTAINER PLANTS

Plants are always better off in the ground during winter in freezing climates. If at all possible, find a spot in your garden to either plant the plants temporarily for the winter or bury them pot and all. Mulch with 2-4 inches of bark or leaves, once the soil has frozen. If you must leave your plants in containers, you'll need to provide some extra protection. Also note that materials like untreated terra cotta can absorb water, which expands when frozen and cracks the pot.

Some tips to give your container plants a bit of an advantage in making it through the winter include:

- Once the ground freezes under the container, water cannot escape the bottom of the pot. The container will thaw before the ground does and if you get a few rainy days, the water will stand in the pot, either rotting the roots or turning into an ice cube when the weather chills again. Avoid this by tilting the pots slightly.
- The more soil in the pot, the better insulated the roots will be. If possible, you could simply slip the existing container into a larger container and fill the side with soil or mulch.
- Cluster several containers together and move them to a sheltered spot, such as near the house or a south facing wall. Encircle the containers with chicken wire and fill with leaves or mulch. Once the ground freezes, add mulch to the tops of the plants.
- Consider using a cold frame or create a makeshift cold frame by surrounding the containers with piles of hay and covering them with an old window or glass door or a sheet of plexi-glass.
- Keep an eye on your plants if the weather warms. It can heat up quickly under glass. Lift the cover if temperatures are going above about 40 degrees F° and remember to close it at night. Even with all your best efforts, you may lose a plant or two to circumstances beyond your control. But you'd be surprised how many will make it.



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