

"Just Add Water"

Articles and Photos by Soni Forsman

Winterizing the container water garden

It is officially fall. That signals time to begin thinking about how-to winter a container water garden. Experiencing unseasonably warm temperatures, it is difficult to even consider this topic, but it will need to be done sooner rather than later.

Container

Remove all the plants and dump the water. Scrub the container and store dry in a garage or storage shed. If it has monetary or sentimental value, you might want to bring it inside.

Bury marginal plant(s)

Hardy marginal/upright plants are easy to hold over for next year. Dig a hole as deep as the tallest pot and as big as the number of pots to be buried. Cut back the foliage to a height of one to two inches. Place the pot(s) in the hole, water well and refill with the dirt removed. If fall rains are scarce, continue to water the area until the ground begins to freeze. Then spread a thick layer of leaves over the area and beyond.

As the weather warms in the spring, rake off the leaves. About a week later, carefully dig up the plant(s), hose off and place in a shallow container of water in a sunny location. New growth may be present when dug or it will come on later. Be patient! Once the growth is several inches tall, the plant(s) is ready for the final move into the container. Or, may be it should be divided before the above step. Either way, fertilize with an aquatic fertilizer when moving.

Bucket waterlily

Pinch off the waterlily pads. Leave any newly emerging pads intact. Keep the waterlily in its planting container and put in a four- or five- gallon bucket filled with water. Place that in a dark above freezing location – 35 to 45 degrees is perfect. If you don't have the ideal spot, put it somewhere dark even if at room temperature. Hardy waterlilies are forgiving.

In early spring (late March/early April) move the waterlily in its bucket of water outside to a sunny location. If growth is present, leave be until the new green pads appear. The ugly white winter stuff will eventually fall off and can then be removed from the bucket. It will survive below freezing temperatures at night and even a coating of ice as long as the temperature climbs above freezing during the day. During an extended cold snap or a very cold night, toss a protective covering over the bucket. Spring is the time to divide if necessary. Fertilize when putting into the decorative container.

Tropical options

Tropical upright (marginal) plant can either be added to the compost pile or taken in and treated as a houseplant. If that is your decision, keep them very moist or sit it in a container of water, assuming the growing pot has drain holes. If not, it would need to be submerged in water. Toss the floating plants, water hyacinth and/or water lettuce, and the trailing parrot feather, if used. The Tut family (Cyperus spp.), King, Prince and Baby Tut are examples of tropical plants that make good houseplants. Pack the bulb-like roots of cannas and taros (Colacasia spp.) in slightly moist peat moss. Replant in the spring. I recommend these wintering suggestions not only for plants from container water gardens but also for water gardens that are too small and/or shallow to protect the plants over the winter. I also use the burying method for all marginal plants considered hardy to zones 5 or 6 and for bog plants, those that prefer moist not wet conditions. It has been my experience that marginal and bog plants hardy in zones 2-6 prefer to winter outdoors rather than inside.



Small waterlily is ready for its winter nap - foliage pinched back with a young pad emerging. It will now be placed in a bucket of water and placed in a dark location with a temperature above freezing. Name is written on the white stake with permanent magic marker.



**Hardy marginal plants snugged together in preparation for winter.
The hole will be refilled with dirt and mulched heavily.**