

Caring for your Tropical Plant

Bring the drama to your outdoor patios this summer! Tropicals offer unbeatable color and pizzazz while being heat tolerant, sun loving and nearly maintenance free.

Light:

Most tropicals require at least 6 hours of direct sunlight for blooming but can handle much more. If moving tropicals outside, from inside, it is always a good idea to acclimate them slowly to the sun. They can sunburn – just like us!

Water:

Plants can suffer with too much, or too little, water. A good general rule is to allow the soil to dry 1/3 of the way down and then water well. Give plants an amount of water equivalent to their container size to ensure that the entire root ball is being soaked. For example, a Hibiscus in a 3-gallon pot should receive at least 3 gallons of water at each watering. Don't allow plants to sit in water, and saucers should be checked regularly and drained if used.

Fertilizer:

Tropical flowers need regular feedings to keep producing their large, showy blooms. Feed March-September with the Family Tree Nursery Time Release Fertilizer. Feeding over the winter is not necessary, however if desired, you could feed with a diluted mix of a balanced water-soluble fertilizer.

Varieties:

- **Tropical Hibiscus**
 - Large, either single or double, blooms in a rainbow of different colors.
- **Plumbago**
 - A native to South Africa, this plant stuns with unusual blue or white ball-shaped flowers.
- **Mandevilla**
 - An aggressive climber with huge pink, red or white flowers. 'Alice Dupont' is the classic.
- **Dipladenia**
 - A more compact bush form of its cousin, Mandevilla.
- **Ixora**
 - A less common tropical shrub with coral flowers and dark glossy foliage.
- **Oleander**
 - Bright ball-shaped flowers in either rosy red, pink, yellow or white atop attractive strappy foliage.
- **Gardenia**
 - Fragrant, creamy white flowers and dark glossy foliage. Supplement monthly feedings with a water-soluble acid fertilizer.

- **Jasmine**
 - Fragrant small flowers on an easy to grow shrub or vine.

- **Bougainvillea**
 - Bright tissue paper-like blooms on a large branching plant. Watch out for thorns!

Possible problems:

Bud drop or bloom failure: Usually caused by not enough light or too much water.

Loss of dark leaf color: Usually caused from insufficient light, overwatering, poor drainage, low soil temperature or an iron deficiency.

Tip burn: Usually due to lack of moisture.

Insects: Tropicals can fall prey to many insects, including aphids, mealybug and scale. To prevent insect problems, use a systemic insecticide monthly in the soil. Once an infestation is detected, we recommend you bring in a sample, in a plastic bag, to our store. We can identify the problem and advise you on the best method to get rid of it.

Overwintering:

It is pretty easy to overwinter your tropical plants inside for the winter months with some preventative care. First cut the plant back 1/3 to 1/2 of the way down. This not only eliminates possible pest populations but prevents the plant from growing too leggy in the lower light of the house. Next, help the plant acclimate to less light by pulling it from full sun outside to a shadier spot outside 1-2 weeks before you bring it inside. Full shade outside is still about twice as much light as your sunniest window inside your home and that adjustment period will help the plant adapt without dropping as many leaves. And finally, spray your plant with an insecticide, like Permethrin, at least twice, 3-4 days apart to eliminate any insects before you bring your plant inside.



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