



ask

the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Email or mail your questions to: info@sprigsandtwigs.net or
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Question #1 this Week: *I was given a Hibiscus as a gift this year and I planted it outside. Now that cooler weather is approaching, what do I need to do? - Mary*

Linda's Observations: There are a number of different plants that people enjoy during our summers that are not perennial in our climate because they cannot withstand our seasonal changes in temperature, humidity and daylight length. All of these need special attention for the fall and winter. Small shrubs and vines (Mandevilla, Hibiscus) need different care than those that grow from bulbs and rhizomes (Dahlias, Elephant ears, Cannas).

Shrubs and vines can be kept actively growing indoors or allowed to go dormant. Make sure you bring them in well before the first frost (in our area, the first frost date is October 15). To keep the plant in active growth, keep it in a sunny place where it stays between 60-70 degrees during the day and 50 degrees at night. Don't overwater, but also be sensitive to winter's lower humidity levels, especially if you heat with a wood stove. If you can, try to keep the humidity in the room at 30%-40%. If you want your plant to go dormant, keep it in its existing pot and in a cool place (40-50 degrees) with little to no sunlight. Keep the soil nearly dry. In dormancy the plant is using a lot less water and having the soil too moist can lead to disease and rot. If you didn't prune your plant before bringing it inside, the leaves will steadily turn color and fall off. This doesn't mean the plant is dying. In dormancy, the roots remain alive in a "sleep mode" but the plant needs to reduce its above-ground mass over the winter. In early spring, re-pot the plant into fresh soil, prune it if needed and fertilize it with a weak dose of liquid fertilizer. Expose the plant to sunlight gradually. Give your plant at least 1 month of indoor growing time before putting it outside and then protect it from bright sunlight and wind for at least 1 week.

In the case of bulbs and rhizomes, they need to be dug up, cleaned and stored in a dry, cool place. Never let them get below freezing. It's a good idea to store them in a container with lightly placed peat moss or wood shavings with air circulation and check them frequently for mold. Label your bulb containers so you remember what they are in the spring!

Take these few simple steps and you will have wonderful blooms in 2016!



Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 19 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..

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