

Gardenias for the Home & Landscape

Ah, the unmistakable fragrance of gardenia! Many are intoxicated its scent and awed by its beautiful blossoms. Gardenia jasminoides is a semi-tropical plant that grows best in a warm, humid atmosphere and location that affords an abundance of sunlight. Gardenias are hardy in zones 8-10. In all other areas, they are treated as houseplants. For those that live in colder climes and visit a southern garden when gardenias are in full bloom in an outside landscape, it is a sight to behold! Specific requirements include:

❖ A southern exposure where the temperatures are in the 70°F range during the day is best for the winter months.

❖ When growing indoors, the night temperature should range between 62-65°F. If lower than this, the plants will grow slowly and the foliage is likely to become yellow-green.

❖ Temperatures above 65 °F at night is partially responsible for the buds dropping, a common difficulty with gardenias. In addition, it encourages vegetative growth at the expense of flower buds.

❖ In warmer climes, locate gardenias in a shrub border with dappled sunlight for best results. The same requirements of an acidic, well-drained soil still apply.

Watering and Humidity

Regular watering is essential for gardenias. Never allow them to become dry. Insert your finger at least 2" into the soil to check for wetness. If the soil feels moist to the touch,

DO NOT WATER!

Ample humidity is also important. You can increase the amount of available humidity to your gardenia and other plants by placing them on a pebble tray. To do this, fill a tray with clean pebbles, stones or gravel and set your houseplants on top of the pebbles. Keep the



area filled with water but do NOT let your houseplants sit in water.

Fertilizing

Occasional fertilizing with a complete fertilizer containing nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium will give your gardenias a needed boost. Be certain to follow the directions on the fertilizer container for frequency and rate of application. Fertilizing during the winter months is generally not recommended.

Possible Problems with Gardenias

Yellowing foliage of gardenia may be caused by factors other than low temperature. A deficiency of iron in soils that are not acid will cause this yellowing symptom. This can be corrected by adjusting the soil pH. (Have a soil test done to find the existing pH of the soil.) An acid-base houseplant fertilizer can be used to lower the soil pH. Gardenias prefer a pH range of 5.0 -6.0.

Overwatering can cause foliage to yellow; allow the soil to remain evenly moist but not saturated.

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Insects

Controlling insect problems on any houseplant can be a challenge. Your best approach is to have the problem identified FIRST, before you apply any control. It is important to know: 1) what the insect is, 2) when it is best to control and 3) what control is most effective. This follows the strategies of Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Pesticides are part of an IPM tool kit. Pesticides, if used, should be applied according to the label directions.

- ❖ Mealybugs are the most prevalent pest to gardenias. They are easily identified by the white cottony masses found in the leaf axils and other protected areas making them difficult to control.
- ❖ Scales can also be a problem. Careful inspection on the stems and underside of the leaves may reveal raised brown bumps (scales).
- ❖ Aphids may be troublesome to gardenias. These soft-bodied, tear-shaped insects can be found



clustered around newer growth and/or the underside of leaves.

- ❖ Nematodes are minute worm-like organisms that work inside the roots and produce swollen, knotted areas. Yellow foliage may later result.

Diseases

Follow the same approach as above when dealing with disease problems:

- ❖ Gardenia canker is caused by the fungus, *Phomopsis gardeniae*. If you propagate cuttings of gardenias, it is recommended that you take cuttings from the top portion of the plant and that you do not syringe these cuttings. Cuttings should be rooted in a sterilized rooting medium only.
- ❖ Powdery mildew can be a problem in areas where there is poor air circulation and excessive moisture on the foliage. If this is the case, improve airflow or relocate the plant. Cut back on excessive moisture.
- ❖ Leaf spots, either fungal or bacterial can cause problems for gardenia. Avoid excessive moisture and areas of poor air circulation.

Summer Care

Gardenias can enjoy the summer months outside (June 1 - September 1) if you live in zones 7 or colder. (See the Plant Hardiness Zone Map in myGardenGuide to find your zone.) Locate your plants away from intense, direct sunlight; filtered bright light is best. Sink the pot up to the rim in the soil. Be sure to keep up with your watering practices.

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