

HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET



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Gardenia



The gardenia is a semi-tropical plant that grows best in a warm, humid atmosphere and in a location that affords an abundance of sunlight. A southern exposure where the temperatures are in the 70°F range during the day is best for the winter months. The night tempera-

ture 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 are partially responsible for the buds dropping, a common difficulty with gardenias and encourages vegetative growth at the expense of flower buds.

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: fill a tray with clean pebbles, stones or gravel. Set your houseplants on top of the pebbles. Keep the area filled with water. Important: do **not** let your houseplants sit in water.

Fertilizing

Occasional fertilizing 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.

Summer Care

Gardenias can enjoy the summer months outside (June 1-September 1). Locate your plants away from intense, direct sunlight; filtered light is best. Sink the pot up to the rim in the soil. Be sure to keep up with your watering practices.

Repotting

Repotting is needed when the roots start to make their way out the bottom of the pot. Repot with a commercially prepared mix available at local florists, garden supply stores or nurseries. To make your own mix, be sure to include 50% sterilized soil and 50% peat moss.

Propagation

Propagation requires terminal leafy cuttings 4-6 inches in length. Insert cuttings into a mixture of half sand and half peat moss. A rooting hormone is beneficial. Rooting will be easier and somewhat more successful if rooted under glass or mist. Different reference sources disagree as to when is the best time to propagate gardenias. The general consensus appears to be spring through the fall. (Some sources will also list anytime of the year, others will say during the winter.)

Other Points

Pruning may be needed from time to time to keep plants bushy and compact. Removal of old wood is a good practice to follow. If your gardenia has become somewhat tired and leggy in appearance, a severe "haircut" may be in order. Follow through with an application of fertilizer to replenish the vigor of the plant.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

Considerations

IPM is a common sense approach to pest control and plant care. It employs a number of measures to prevent, control or reduce plant problems. These include using resistant plant varieties, proper plant selection and placement, good aftercare and biological and/or mechanical controls. As a last resort, after all other remedies have been explored, a pesticide* that is least toxic to people and natural predators, can be considered. Prior to using any pesticides, plants should always be monitored for the degree of infestation and a sensible control measure considered.

* A pesticide is a substance that kills, or attempts to kill, a particular pest, e.g. **insecticide**, **fungicide**, **herbicide**, etc.

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Possible Problems with Gardenias

Yellowing foliage: Yellowing of gardenia foliage may be caused by factors other than low temperature. A deficiency of iron in soils that are not acid will cause yellowing. 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 soil pH. Gardenias prefer a pH range of 5.0-6.0.

Too frequent watering can also be a cause for yellowing foliage. Allow the soil to remain evenly moist but not saturated.

Insects

Mealybugs are the most prevalent pest of gardenias. They are easily identified by the white cottony masses found in the leaf axils and other protected areas. Scales can also be a problem. Careful inspection of the stems and undersides of leaves may reveal raised brown bumps (scales). Spider mites are another insect pest. One control for these three insects is to wash the plants with soapy water and a soft brush or cloth to remove insects. Thoroughly wash undersides of leaves where pests may also reside. Remove mealybugs with tweezers or a toothpick. Rubbing alcohol on a swab can be used to remove scales and mealybugs. Make a swab by attaching a tuft of cotton to the tip of a thin stick. Dip the cotton end in rubbing alcohol, then touch the insect and gently remove it. Be careful not to spread alcohol on the plant tissue because injury can occur. With spider mites and scale, a jet of clean water can also be used to knock insects off. Insecticidal soap or neem may also be used. Other insecticides may be used for spider mites. Chemical pesticides may be available. If you choose to use a chemical pesticide,

contact your local Cooperative Extension office for specific recommendations. Before using any pesticide, read the label carefully and follow all directions.

Nematodes are minute worm-like organisms that work inside the roots and produce swollen, knotted areas. Yellow foliage may later result. The only recommended method of control is disposal of the plant.

Diseases

Canker is caused by the fungus *Phomopsis gardeniae*. If you propagate cuttings of gardenias, it is recommended that you take them from the top portion of the plant and not syringe them. Cuttings should be rooted in a sterilized rooting medium only.

Fungal leaf spot may be averted by not wetting foliage. Water early in the day so the aboveground plant parts will dry as quickly as possible. Practice plant sanitation. When plants are not wet, carefully remove and destroy or discard affected plant parts or portions thereof.

If buds are dropping, avoid high night temperatures.

"This publication contains pesticide recommendations. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly and human errors are still possible. Some materials mentioned may no longer be available, and some uses may no longer be legal. All pesticides distributed, sold or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension specialist or your regional DEC office (631) 444-0341. Read the label before applying any pesticide. Cornell Cooperative Extension and its employees assume no liability for the effectiveness or results of any chemicals for pesticide usage. No endorsement of products is made or implied."