

Preparing Winter Storage for Fuchsias, Geraniums, and Tuberous Plants

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Winter storage of living plant materials requires the same attention to details as their culture. Whether the plant survives the winter in your storage, and whether it continues to develop the following season depend on a number of factors.

Storage temperature and humidity, the condition of the plant as it goes into storage, and freedom from diseases and insects all have a bearing on how the plant survives the winter.

Generally, fuchsias, geraniums, and tuberous-rooted plants are stored from one growing season to the next. To be successful, follow these cultural practices.

Fuchsias

Fuchsias vary in their ability to withstand winter temperatures. Some species are quite hardy and can winter over outside if they are in a protected area or you shelter them from freezing winds. However, freezing temperatures can easily injure most garden varieties so they need protection in the winter.

Fuchsias growing in the ground can be topped back to one-half their original size, mounded over with enough sawdust, bark or other granular insulating material to cover the entire plant, and left in the ground through the winter.

Move pot-grown fuchsias (including hanging-basket types) into a cool greenhouse or some other cool, frost-free area (garage, porch, insulated box, cold frame, or trench) where you can hold them in a semidormant condition. Before storing, prune the plants severely, leaving only two or three buds on the current season's wood. The plants should be as near dormant as possible

when you prune. Here's an outline of storage conditions that have been used successfully:

1. Store in a sheltered box or cold frame with insulation material such as sawdust, vermiculite, bark dust, or peat moss packed over and around the plants (Figure 1). Prune the plants and protect them with at least 8 inches of insulation between the plant and the outside edge of the box or frame. In late March or early April, before the plants begin new growth, remove them from storage, repot, and hold them indoors as house plants until all danger of frost is past.

2. Dig a trench 2 to 3 feet deep in a well-drained location (Figure 2). Place several inches of insulating material in the bottom of the trench, lay or set the pruned plants (pot and all) in the bottom, cover with the insulating material, and place soil over the top. Plants should be fully dormant before covering.

3. Keep the plants in a cool, well-lighted growing structure where they can be kept active—basement, garage, cool greenhouse, or window wells covered with glass or plastic. Plants stored in this manner need plenty of light, temperatures above freezing, and enough light watering to keep the plants functioning.

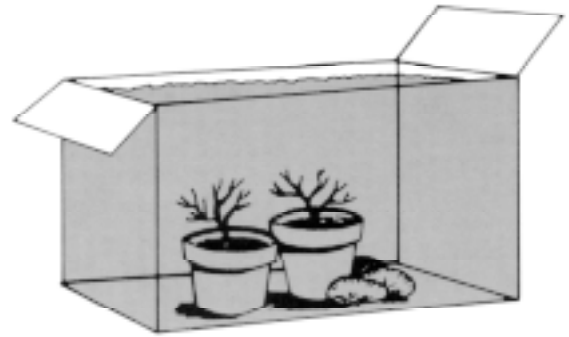


Figure 1.—Box storage (the screened area represents the insulating material).

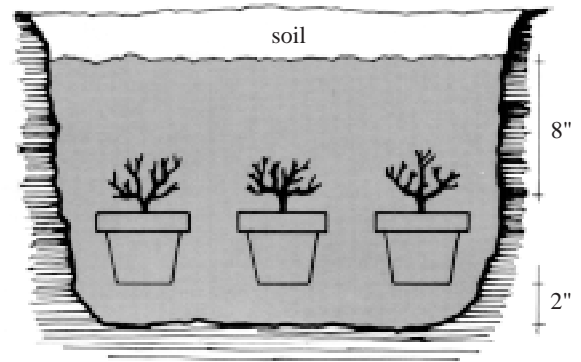


Figure 2.—Trench or pit storage (the screened area represents the insulating material).

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Geraniums

Dig geraniums in the fall before heavy frosts if you plan to overwinter them. Before storing, remove all dead, diseased, and damaged plant parts to avoid rot. Destroy insects by dusting or spraying the plants with the appropriate pesticide. Here are four overwintering methods for geraniums:

1. Dig with as many roots as possible, prune back the top about halfway, and plant in the smallest pot that will hold the root ball. Keep the potted plants in the house or place them in a cool greenhouse where they can be kept active during the winter.

2. Lift the geranium, shake the soil from the root system, and hang the unpruned plant upside down in a cool, dark storage area through the winter. This is one of the less successful methods, but it has worked for some gardeners. In the spring, repot or replant the geranium after pruning away withered or dead foliage and stems.

3. Dig and store in boxes of insulating material. Leave the soil around the root system, prune away about half the top, lay the plant on several inches of insulation material on the bottom of the box, and cover with at least 8 inches of insulation (Figure 2). Store in a cool, dry area.

4. One of the better and less troublesome methods is to take healthy 4-inch cuttings from the parent plant in late fall. Discard the old plant and root the cuttings in damp sand. When rooted, pot and store the cuttings indoors until safe to set them out in the spring.

Tuberous begonias

Lift mature plants carefully before hard frosts in the fall. Cut back most of the top, leaving the ball of roots and soil intact. Place in a dry, cool storage area (basement or garage) and allow the tubers to cure for several weeks. After curing, shake off the soil and remove the remaining stalks and roots. Any portion of the stalk that is left may rot, and this could kill the entire tuber.

Store tubers by placing them on screen trays or by packing them in dry peat, sand, or insulating material. A dry, dark, cool storage area is best.

You can start plants in the spring by placing the tubers on damp peat moss and giving them warm temperatures. When roots and tops have started, plant them in small pots or in an outside bed when danger of frost is past.

Cannas and dahlias

Carefully dig the plants after the first frost, or at the onset of hard winter rains. Remove the top, leaving only 4 to 5 inches of stem attached to the tuber clump. Wash off all dirt, cut away any diseased, damaged, or insect-infested parts, and set in the sun to dry the surface of the tubers. Storage and handling from that point can proceed along one of two lines:

1. Leave the clump of tubers intact and place in nearly dry sawdust, sand, peat moss, or other granular insulating media. The storage area should be cool, frost-free, and dry.

In the spring, remove the clump from storage and divide by cutting the cluster into sections, each containing at least one tuber and an eye or vegetative bud (Figure 3). Plant in well-drained, fertile soil.

2. Divide the clump after cleaning and drying. Each section should have a tuber and vegetative bud. Store as described in the first method.

Dividing the clump before storage takes less space, but leaving the clump intact during storage usually results in less tuber shrinkage.

Examine tubers periodically during the winter for signs of decay. Discard any decaying tubers to prevent spread of rot. Tubers should be replanted in the spring when danger of frost is past.

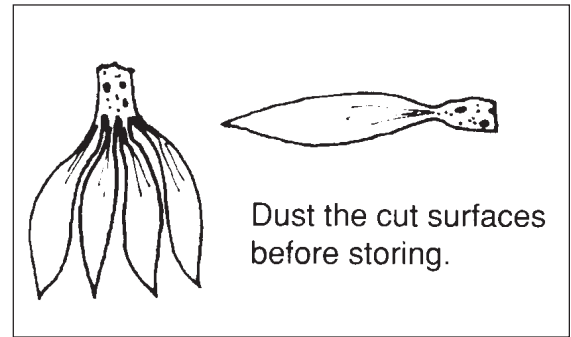


Figure 3.—Dividing a clump of dahlia tubers.

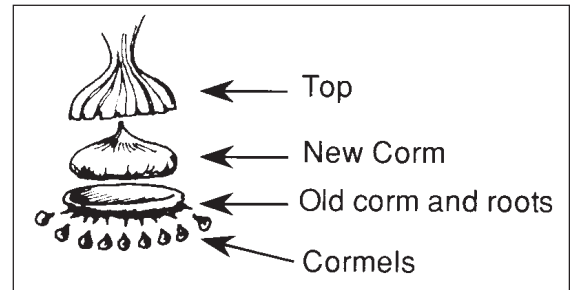


Figure 4.—Preparing a gladiolus corm for storage.

Gladioli

Lift gladioli about the middle of October or when the tops start to turn yellow and die. Cut the tops back to 2 or 3 inches and dry the larger corms on screens or sunny, well-aerated surfaces. Unless space is unlimited for planting, cormels usually are discarded and only the larger corms are saved for replanting. When the corm is sufficiently dry, remove the old tops, corms, and cormels (Figure 4).

Store the larger, new corms on screen trays or in dry vermiculite, sawdust, or sand in a cool, dark, dry place. Inspect the corms frequently during the winter and discard any diseased or rotten material. Replant when danger of frost is past.

