

Gardenias are low-growing evergreen shrubs prized for their sweetly-scented white flowers. The foliage is shiny, dark green and leathery. Gardenias normally flower during the summer, however, pinching off the flower buds in summer and fall will induce winter blooming. Flower color ranges from a pure, almost waxy white to a cream color. The flowers may be fully double or semi-double. Houseplant gardenias, *Gardenia jasminoides* or *Gardenia grandiflora* are also called Cape Jasmine, though they are unrelated to true jasmines. They normally grow about 18 inches tall and wide.

Proper Care

Light: Gardenias like bright indirect light. Keep them somewhere well-lit but out of direct sun.

Watering: In the summer, let the top ½ inch of soil dry out between waterings, then thoroughly moisten the soil. In the winter, let the top inch or two dry out before watering again. Always use tepid water as cold water can shock the roots.

Temperature and Humidity: To bring a gardenia into flower, the plant needs a steady temperature of 62-63°F while the flower buds are forming. A sudden change either warmer or colder can make the buds drop off. When plants are not forming flower buds, room temperatures of 60-75°F are fine. Keep humidity high, especially during flower bud formation by keeping the pot on a pebble tray and misting the leaves with room-temperature water once a day. When plants are in bloom, try not to wet the flowers as this may cause spots on the petals.

Feeding: Fertilize with an acidic formula every two weeks from March through September.

Repotting: Use a lime-free potting soil high in organic matter. (Peat moss can increase both acidity and organic matter.) Repot gardenias only when the roots have nearly filled the pot. A good indication that the plant is ready for a bigger pot is when you see roots starting to grow through the drainage holes or on the soil surface. Repot only in the spring, and disturb the root ball as little as possible. Gardenias do best when slightly tight in their pots.

Special Tips: Early spring pruning will help keep your gardenia low and bushy. Pinch out the growing tips, (not the flower buds) and prune out half to two-thirds of the old wood. Keep an eye out for spider mites which especially love stressed plants in low-humidity environments.