

With a little effort, some flowers sold as annuals can be overwintered to give you multiple seasons of bloom. Hanging fuchsias, geraniums, and tuberous begonias can all, with care, be kept dormant in a sheltered location and brought back into bloom the following year. An unheated basement, garage, or crawl space that stays cool but above freezing can be the ideal space to store them.

HANGING FUCHSIAS

In the fall after the leaves have fallen, trim the plants back to 8-10 inches. We recommend spraying with Neem oil to help prevent fungal diseases.

Remove the plants from their baskets and wrap the root ball in damp paper.

The most important thing is to keep fuchsias as cool as possible without freezing. A cool basement is ideal but anywhere that stays between 35° and 45° F is okay.

If you don't have a suitable storage area, you can dig a pit or use a wooden bin large enough to hold all your plants and keep the bin in a sheltered location. If so, to protect the fuchsias from rain and/or frost, cover them with dry leaves, straw, or any other coarse light material.

Maintain an adequate moisture level. More fuchsias die from drying out than from freezing.

In late February or early March when the danger of extreme cold is past, move the fuchsias to an area that is warmer (about 50° F) and light. Replant them, and when new growth shows, start fertilizing. Watch for insects and diseases which can thrive in the warmer environment. Pinch them back when they have grown about 4-6 inches. Plant outside again after all danger of frost has passed (usually around mid-April).

GERANIUMS

In the fall before the first heavy frost, cut the tops back to about 6" above the soil. Potted plants may be left in their containers. Geraniums in the ground should be dug, then the roots packed closely together in a deep box and covered with peat or potting soil.

Geraniums prefer to winter over in a dimly-lit area at temperatures between 40° and 45° F.

Maintain an adequate moisture level. Water them when you first put them into storage, then check occasionally and water only enough to prevent shriveling.

In April, pot up the surviving plants in good potting soil, water well, and place in bright light. Start fertilizing when new growth starts. Plants can go outside when nighttime temperatures stay above 50° F (usually around mid-May).

TUBEROUS BEGONIAS

In the fall before the first heavy frost, cut the stalks and flowers, leaving about 5 inches of stem on the tuber. Lift the tuber gently with a trowel or two spoons. It's important not to damage or nick the tuber. During the summer, the tuber may have grown, so check carefully. Sometimes this is easier to do if the plant is knocked out of the pot.

Set the tuber, with stems and some soil still on it, in a cool, dry, dark place. Let it dry out. After about a month, the stems will fall off or easily rub off. Don't twist or force.

Bury the tubers in a slightly moist medium, such as peat moss or potting soil. Moisten just enough so that the material is perceptibly damp, but not drippy or soggy. It won't be necessary to re-moisten during the dormant period.

Store in an unheated area, preferably around 40-50° F.

Check the tubers during storage. By early spring (February), small pinkish buds may show. Pot the tubers before those buds expand into shoots. If the shoots are broken or damaged, the begonia's health will be impaired.

Settle the tuber into a pot of potting soil, covering with only about a half-inch of soil. Place the tuber with buds facing up. Keep the soil moist, and move the pots to a brightly-lit area. If possible, grow in temperatures around 65° F (cooler at night).

If all goes well, strong plants with good shoots will be available to set outside in mid-May or early June, when our nighttime temperatures are above 50° F (usually around mid-May).