

Wintering Plants in Phoenix

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Most of my plants are outside during warm weather under a patio cover made from polycarbonate greenhouse material. Exceptions are winter growers. Many of these I put on a north windowsill and forget about them until nights cool down.

In November each year, I move plants to their winter sites. Most winter growers go outside under the patio cover where they get sun and frost protection. The “summer growers,” though, are not a uniform group. Some tolerate more frost than we ever get in Phoenix, and many can’t tolerate cool weather at all. Some of the plants will grow and bloom all winter if it’s just a little warmer than normal outside winter weather in Phoenix.

Here is how I winter my plants. The frost-hardy ones get moved to my front yard where they will be outside in full sun all day, fully exposed to all elements. I water and fertilize them regularly through the winter (they are seldom dry more than a week at a time) and grow all winter. I have found these plants require cold exposure to flower well. This group includes *Carnegiea*, many *Echinocereus*, *Echinopsis*, *Haageocereus*, *Harrisia*, *Lobivia*, high altitude Matucanas such as *M. aureiflora*, *Morawetzia*, *Neocardenasia*, many *Opuntia* kin, *Oreocereus*, *Oroya*, *Rebutias*, *Sulcorebutia*, and *Trichocereus*. I don’t have any frost-hardy succulents.

The tough, but not quite frost hardy plants requiring cool winters to flower stay under the glazed patio cover. I remove all shade cloth. The more tender get moved against the house. This cactus group includes *Ariocarpus*, *Borzicactus*, *Cereus*, *Cleistocactus*, *Copiopoa*, *Echinocactus*, *Echinofassulocactus* (aka *Stenocactus*), some *Echinocereus*, *Ferocactus*, *Frailea*, *Gymnocalycium*, *Mammillaria*, *Monvillea*, *Myrtillocactus*, *Neoraimondia*, *Notocactus*, *Obregonia*, *Parodia*, *Peniocereus*, *Stenocereus*, *Turbinicarpus*, and *Weingartia*. The succulents include *Agave*, *Aloe*, asclepiads, *Cucurbits*, *Haworthia*, and mesembs. I will water all these if we have a week or two of warm weather. I usually resume regular watering in January if weather permits. Some years, if I’ve had mealy bug problems, I bring the ascleps into an unheated room of my house where I will see them more often to watch for mealy damage. I don’t water the ascleps in the winter much at all, and only if temperatures are really high.

After I’d been in my house a few years, I noticed a south-facing patio with cover was shaded by the eave overhang during the summer, but sunlit in the winter. I have plenty of summer growing space, but had no good winter site for warmth lovers, since I rarely heat my house. I enclosed the patio with standard eight foot high sliding glass doors and had the area between the tops of the doors and the cover filled with windows. I left the floor four inches below the floor level of the house, and left a space about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch under one door for water drainage to outside. Now I have a winter greenhouse that gets sun for just over $\frac{1}{2}$ the day. I leave the doors from the patio to the house open during the day, and close them at night. I put a strong fan in there for air circulation and a small space heater for really cold nights. This greenhouse heats my entire house most of the winter and

provides a warm, often humid environment for my warmth-loving plants. In here for the winter go Adenia, Adenium, Brachystelma, terrestrial bromeliads, cacti from Baja, Brazil and the Caribbean (Dendrocereus, Discocactus, some Mammillaria, Melocactus, Pachycereus, and Pilosocereus) and some Cleistocactus for January flowers, Euphorbia, Fockea, succulent orchids, Pachypodium, Pulmeria, and Pterodiscus.

Look around. You can fit lots more plants in your house.