

Plant Exchange:

One Way To Overwinter Favorite Outdoor Plants

Share tips from your plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or send your questions related to outdoor or indoor plants to news@yankton.net Attn: Brenda Johnson or write to P&D, 319 Walnut St, Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson.

BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Gardeners invest time and money in annuals and out-of-zone plants for the yard. At the end of the season, this cutting method can be used to overwinter selected plants and is simple and space efficient during the winter. The method is adaptable for other kinds of plants with varying success.

Q: How do you process and overwinter plant cuttings for next season outdoors?

A: Evelyn Schindler of Yankton has gardened for at least fifty years. For her coleus plant collection, it took years to find just the right contrasting and complementary leaf colors that she grows in her flowerbeds each summer. A space and time-efficient way she overwinters coleus stock is by cuttings. She also uses this vegetative propagation method with other plants she wants to overwinter such as passion vine, copper plant, hibiscus, and a favorite fern in decline with varying success. She starts this process before first frost for optimal plant quality.

The coleus plant roots easily when the stem and leaves are supplied with the moist growing environment it needs. Evelyn shows us how to process and overwinter the cuttings and shares other ways to use these methods.

MATERIALS

Plant pot
Potting soil
Clear plastic storage bag with the opening wider than the pot circumference
Rubber band to hold the bag closed around the pot
Scissors for trimming plant
Pencil
Shop light that can adjust to about ten inches above the plant shelf
Warm and cool florescent bulbs for shop light.
Optional: Light timer, seed flat for moving containers and placement under shop light, plastic dome that fits seed flat to use instead of individual plastic bags.

METHODS

- Evelyn cuts a coleus stem with several leaves from the mother plant. She removes lower leaves. "I cut off about half of each leaf to reduce moisture loss from leaves while the plant grows roots," she said. This also makes the plant mass compact so as to fit many plants under the shop light. Soon the plant grows new whole leaves.
- "This potting soil has been (thoroughly) moistened," Evelyn said. "I poke a hole into the soil with a pencil and stick the plant into the hole up the first leaves."
- "I mist the soil, plant and inside the plastic bag." She secures the bag over the plant and down onto the container and holds it in place with a rubber band.
- Evelyn's plant stands are sturdy plastic shelves on which she installed the shop lights with "S" hooks for easy adjustment of



the shop light chains as the plants grow. She keeps the lights near above the plants but not touching them. The basement where the plant stands are located is a little cooler than the rest of the house, but she says that the lights do add some heat. Her basement has little indirect light.

- She establishes how often to mist plants and soil by when leaves become slightly wilted the first time. "I snip the corners of plastic bag for vents. I use a clean Shout spray bottle with water and insert the nozzle into the bag vent." Misting is easy and bags don't have to be removed each watering. She mists soil, plant, and inside the bag. "When the leaves don't wilt, the plant is rooted and the bag can be removed."
- "I cut each plant back several times before next spring, shaping each plant. I cut above the leaf node each time." She shapes the plant when she waters, so it is ready to transplant outdoors.
- "In spring, after the last frost, I put them outdoors in a somewhat shaded and protected area (several days) so the plants get used to outdoors before transplanting."

While a fan of simple materials, Evelyn has modified her methods when working with many plants at once. She uses plastic pots that fit inside a seed flat with its clear plastic dome lid. In Step (C) she moistens the inside of the dome lid. "When the plants begin to grow, they push the lid up. I do prop the lid up so the plants become accustomed to room air after a time. When the leaves don't wilt, plants have rooted and lid can be removed."

"This flat with dome lid holds 18 pots. This pot size and growing capacity works especially well with coleus." Spring is a busy time and each plant is ready to transplant outdoors. She has also put three coleus cuttings into a six-inch diameter container and then uses them as mother plants for vegetative offspring in spring.

Evelyn is also propagating a special fern with the bag method. "I think the fern is called Hen & Chick fern. Small plants grow along

the fern margins." The mother plant is in decline and she is trying this mini-misting greenhouse bag method with one of the vegetative ferns in order to grow a replacement fern.

This vegetative propagation method is adaptable to outdoor or indoor plants with varying success according to plant characteristics.

ABOVE: The coleus is planted in the hole in the soil, up to the lower leaves. LEFT: A plastic dome lid that fits the seed tray and holds 18 plant pots is a refinement of Evelyn Schindler's method for overwintering coleus. She says this modification conserves space under the shop light and is the coleus pot size that transplants well in spring. (Photos: Brenda K. Johnson)

Plant Exchange: Blog With Us!

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- What are plant tips for fall?
- See yard décor and landscaping ideas of gardeners in the region.
- Tell us your favorite plants that withstand heat, cold, and are drought tolerant.
- See region-hardy trees selected for a nearby state park. Find out how trees are managed in a low-maintenance nursery.
- See how the City of Yankton makes compost for home use.
- Learn about the status of cottonwood forests along the Missouri River.
- See a fairy garden or other miniature garden that might interest a tiny space gardener.

Check us out at the web address:
brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com

Dibbles And Bits

- Better results in growing plants by cuttings come from attention to the plant's environment. As plant cells regenerate roots and other parts in vegetative propagation, attention to humidity, light, and temperature is important. Evelyn Schindler's coleus technique in today's feature shows that materials can be few and simple, but are quite important. Air in a heated house is usually dryer than outdoors. Extra humidity is needed because plants give off water (transpire) as they grow. Wilted plants need moisture and can absorb water through leaves as well as soil. Trimming off half each leaf helps reduce moisture loss. New leaves grow. Plastic bag tent or plastic dome over cuttings helps maintain higher humidity than indoor air. Adequate air and soil space is provided for each plant to grow. Light from warm and cool fluorescent bulbs is adequate but the light needs to be near the plants without scorching the leaves. Even temperature is optimal. A little heat is given off from fluorescent lights and a slightly cooler basement provides balance. Plants can use all their energy to grow in a stress-free environment. Source: Plant Propagation by Alan Toogood
- What are your hardy perennials, shrubs, and trees? Some

plants have continued to grow and thrive, even in this challenging season. October Garden Gate Magazine, found at Yankton Community Library, has examples such as Astilbe, coral-bells, goat's beard, yarrow, perennial phlox, and threadleaf coreopsis.

- Water efficient plants for fall planting that also have bold color, durability, and low care according to High Country Gardens Catalog: 1.800.925.9387. Included are Gailardia or Blanket Flower, a 2005 All-American Selections Winner, 'Firewitch' Dianthus (a Perennial Plant of the Year) Asclepias or Butterfly Weed, Verbena, May Night Salvia, Oenothera or Evening Primrose, 'Husker Red' Penstemon. Many of these can also be found at local nurseries.

- A few spring blooming plants may bloom again. Crabapple, lilac, forsythia, viburnum and some other spring-flowering plants may bloom in late summer if they have been exposed to drought and high temperatures during the summer, according to Dr. John Ball, South Dakota State University. "The combined drought and heat causes the plant to enter a shallow dormancy. When slightly cooler temperatures (and sometimes moisture) return with September some flower buds open with having to fulfill their normal chilling requirements." Pest Update by Dr. John Ball, SD Cooperative Extension

<http://sdda.sd.gov/Forestry/Educational-Information/PDF/pest-alert-2012-Sept-12.pdf>

October Plant Tips

Diane Dickes of Diane's Greenhouse and Nursery, Fordyce Nebraska (402) 357.3754, offers suggestions for fall plant-related activity. Website: www.dianesgreenhouse.com

- Feed the birds. They are storing up for winter, so keep your feeders full.
- Stop fertilizing plants that are planted in the ground. To fertilize this time of year is confusing to the plant. They need to go dormant, so they can store

energy for winter survival.

- Photograph your flowerbeds for future reference of do and don'ts.
- Fall is for planting. Planting in fall is less stressful on plants. You can plant until the ground is frozen solid!
- Water deeply once per week. Soil around all plants needs to go into winter moist.
- As weather cools, perennials that have overgrown their space, should be dug and divided.
- Clean garden of all debris and add mushroom compost. This will enrich your soil for next year.

Before And After

If you enjoy ornamental grasses as a specimen plant, native little bluestem overwinters well in the ground in this region. Subtle blue red hues add color in the fall. Its three red topped clump lasts through the winter.

Native plants are known for weather hardness when planted in ground. Little bluestem is shown in its second season in a container. What is remarkable about this plant is that, before the photo, it overwintered outdoors in the container.

Presumed for winter death as many ornamental grasses in container gardens, it received no watering last fall. It also survived freeze/thaw exposure last winter that usually kills container plants in this region.

After winter, during spring cleanup, time came to remove the plant. However, new season green foliage had appeared, so it received modest watering this season. Some plants survive and thrive in spite of care.



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Native little bluestem, now in its second year, is a clump grass that will reach about 3 ft. in height. Stems turn blue/red in fall and move with breeze for fall and winter interest.

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