

# Home & Garden Education Center



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EXTENSION

## Going on Vacation? Make Sure Your Plants Enjoy it too!

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Summertime means vacation time to many people. Just because you are headed for some carefree down time, doesn't mean all your plants can be left to fend for themselves. Perhaps one or more of these suggestions will ensure healthy, happy plants upon your return.

Many houseplants will be perfectly content to be left alone for up to a week if they are watered thoroughly before you leave. Move them away from direct sun or partially close the curtains, blinds or other window coverings to filter the sunlight if moving them is not an option.

For longer periods, consider grouping them in the bathtub or shower to keep the humidity a bit higher thereby reducing water loss a bit more. Well-watered plants can also be placed in large clear plastic bags. Blow in them to puff them up and then twist tie shut and place out of direct sunlight. Plants can probably last 2 to 3 weeks. Another option would be those water bulbs, which are filled with water and then stuck into pots.

If you have a lot of houseplants, consider enlisting the help of a friend or neighbor to come in and water them. While watering seems like such a simple activity, it would be best to review with your plant sitter, how much water each plant gets as well as how frequently to water. Keep in mind your house may be warmer when closed up and plants may need to be watered more frequently.

Outdoor container plants may be a bit more challenging as often there are a number of containers of different sizes filled with different plant species in varying locations. One option for shorter vacations is to group them all under a shade tree or porch or even in a cool garage giving them a good drink before leaving.

If you are a regular vacationer, consider planting in self-watering containers. These have reservoirs on the bottom that can be filled with water and will keep plants moist for up to a week depending on how hot the weather is and the size and number of plants in the pot. Even these have limitations in hot, sunny sites so if possible, moved to a shaded location.



Image by Dawn Pettinelli, UConn

Smaller containers could be placed together in tubs filled with 1 to 2 inches of water if you will be away for a couple of weeks. Self-watering gadgets like those spikes that are screwed on to wine or soda bottles may work well with larger containers. You might need more than one per pot and could experiment before you leave. Cover the surface of the larger containers with a layer of mulch to keep moisture in.

Usually perennial and shrub beds can be left unattended but not so much the vegetable garden and annual beds, especially if any were more recently planted. First make sure beds are weeded so plants are not competing with weeds for moisture. Next, pick any ripe vegetables. The whole purpose of an annual plant be it a zucchini or marigold, is to set seed and a plant does this by producing fruit or flowers. If fruits are not harvested or flowers not removed when they past their prime, the plant thinks its job is done and production of more fruits or flowers slows.

Give the garden a good watering and mulch with untreated grass clippings, straw or whatever other material you might have available. Mulching cuts down on water loss by about 25 percent.

Your options for the vegetable and annual beds include drip irrigation systems as well as soaker hoses. Newer drip irrigation systems are not terribly expensive or difficult to set up but they work best when the garden configuration stays more or less the same each year. Also, they are easiest to install when the plants are small. They can be put on a timer so the garden stays watered when you are gone.

Soaker hoses and sprinklers may be a better option when gardens are more spread out and when your planting scheme changes each year. Both can be connected to timers and container plants could be moved to receive sprinkler water.

If you collect water in a rain barrel, many of them have spigots that could be connected to your soaker hose. Before you leave, water the garden, fill the rain barrel if we have not had any rain lately and attach the soaker hose to it. Water will slowly seep out and keep the area covered by the soaker hose moist for a few days longer.

Another inexpensive way to water vegetable plants is to collect plastic gallon jugs and make a few tiny holes on the bottom of one corner. Fill the jugs with water and set them next to a plant. This works best for smaller gardens.

As with your houseplants, it might be wise to engage the help of a friend or neighbor. Perhaps you could form a watering consortium where each would take turns watering another person's plants or gardens while they are on vacation and have someone come and attend to theirs when they are away from home.

For more suggestions on what to do with your plants when you are on vacation or on other home and gardening topics, call the UConn Home & Garden Education Center, toll-free, at (877) 486-6271, check out our website at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.